

BROUGHT TO BAY

OF

EXPERIENCES of a CITY DETECTIVE

By James McGowan.



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melodies harmonised as duets for two violins, and interspersed with scales, exercises, and instructions, so as to form an elementary course of instruction. The aim of the author has been, in fact, to make easier the work both of beginners on this difficult instrument and of the teacher. As most of the instruction books take for granted a certain amount of knowledge on the part of the pupil, there is ample room for a work which, like this, begins at the beginning. The author is a violinist of experience, and the book furnishes abundant evidence of his thorough knowledge of his subject."—*Scotsman*.

"We can heartily commend it as an efficient and trustworthy guide for young or old, who intend learning to play the violin. The collection of airs is most attractive, and they are all pleasantly harmonised as duets for two violins. The author has put clear-headed practical instruction in every page. It will decidedly give a great impetus to violin playing, for he has succeeded in making the subject so attractive that we feel half inclined, stiff as our fingers are, to take up the fiddle and the bow, so easy and simple does the learning of the instrument seem from the lessons here given."—*People's Friend*.

"Of this work we learn that 1500 copies were sold the first month of issue. The 'Tutor' seems admirably adapted to the object aimed at—the providing of easy and attractive lessons for young beginners on the most delightful of all musical instruments."—*Aberdeen Journal*.

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"Useful hints for teachers and pupils are here given, with a good selection of pieces for practice."—*Pictorial World.*

"As a beginner's method it could not be easier. The difficulties are reduced to a minimum by an exceedingly gradual and highly pleasurable course of study, and by the plainest possible verbal instruction. The author, who is clearly an enthusiast and a most capable instructor in the art of violin playing, spares no pains to secure the pupil's comfort as he progresses, the result being that the learner feels the labour of practice lost in the love for it. The course of study is almost entirely through familiar airs set as duets, and selected with remarkable aptitude to ensure safe and smooth progress."—*Dundee Advertiser.*

"To learn to play the violin while young is universally admitted to be the only road to marked ability with that wonderful instrument; but where is the violin tutor which any child could look at without its brain beginning to reel? The author of 'The Violin: How to Master it,' who may fairly take credit for much of the impetus given to violin playing within the past few years, answers this question by producing a tutor which, with what we take to be a touch of sly humour, he says is 'arranged on an entirely new principle, in a pleasing and attractive manner, for the use of beginners.' Certain success awaits 'The Young Violinist's Tutor.'"—*People's Journal.*

"The violin has come greatly into request lately with ladies, and it is found that the more delicate fingers of girls are not less calculated to attain mastery of the finger-board than those of men. It has, moreover, been abundantly shown that the female performer on the violin has a style, and produces a tone quite unlike those of her male compeer, and that the fiddle in her hands is revealed as a new instrument. These few remarks are deemed *à propos* of the 'Tutor' before us, which is thoroughly practical, and has our warm commendation."—*The Queen.*

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OR

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BY JAMES M'GOVAN.

NINTH EDITION.

EDINBURGH:
JOHN MENZIES & COMPANY.
LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & CO.

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PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

WHEN five editions of a work such as this, by a writer utterly unknown, are called for within eighteen months, and that in times when thousands have been more concerned how to get bread than books, it would be ungrateful of the Author to remain longer silent.

To the thousands who have hung over these pages, "in laughter or in sympathetic tears;" to the critics who, without a single exception, have reviewed them in hearty and unqualified praise; and to the many who, in the fulness of their hearts, have written to me in enthusiastic appreciation of the simple incidents chronicled by me, I now return more than mere thanks. I give them the love which they have blown to me from all parts of the globe.

If these unadorned scenes, drawn as faithfully as possible from real life, continue to move the hearts of the readers in sympathy with what one critic (*Literary World*) describes as "the struggles of the poor, the self-sacrificing love often exhibited by them, and the fearful pressure at times of adverse circumstances," or to stir up sparkles of wholesome merriment in the hearts of the weary and worn, the writer will have reaped the sweetest reward that earth can bestow.

JAMES M'GOVAN

EDINBURGH, 1879.

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BROUGHT TO BAY.

A FRIENDLY LIFT.

I DARESAY if a dozen cases of crime were taken at random, and the mode of their detection analysed, in ten cases out of the twelve it would be found that the connecting link in the chain of evidence was some apparently chance circumstance. A kindly word, a chance remark, a look, a tone, a fluttering scrap of paper picked aimlessly off the ground, or a humane action done and forgotten, often do for the detective what no amount of bravery, perseverance, or patience could accomplish.

My first essay in the detecting of crime was in a penny show at the head of Leith Wynd, in Edinburgh, when I was a wee barefooted laddie, of about ten. I was standing in the shade, near the entrance, gazing wistfully at the favoured few who were crowding in past the fat woman who took the money, and doubtless reflecting bitterly on the inequalities of fortune, when a man's hand was laid softly on my shoulder, and I heard the words—

“Well, Jimmy, are ye gaun in the nicht?”

The tone was kindly and familiar, and I recognised the speaker in a moment. It was M'Dermott, one of the “Fief-catchers,” as we called them, for the district. We boys held him in great awe and dread; but, some time before, the feeling had been entirely dissipated in me, by him picking me up when I had fallen and cut my hand on a broken bottle, tearing a strip from his own handkerchief, tenderly binding up the gash, and leading me home to my mother.

“No, sir; no the nicht,” I answered, reddening a little. “I have only been in twice a'thegither”—which was true. My mother—a poor, hard-working widow—had a horror of such places; but by the aid of two bottles which I had picked up, carefully washed, and sold, I had twice beheld the mysterious

and thrilling wonders which were enacted inside the rotten boards, when the gaudy daub called a "drop scene" was jerked up before our admiring eyes.

"Well, Jimmy, would you like to go in now, and earn a shilling as well?"

A shilling!—a whole shilling! Why, that was as much as my mother could earn in a day, and she had told me of one whole week in which she had only earned two. The word almost took my breath away.

"Besides," added the detective, mistaking my surprise for hesitation, "you'll get four more when the thief is tried."

Four more! Five bright shillings! I shook all over with eager anticipation, as I hurriedly whispered, "Oh, sir, I'll dae't. What is it?"

"A little further back," he whispered, drawing me deeper into the shade. "A few hours ago, a boy, taller and stouter than you, snatched a purse from a lady's hand at a shop door on the Bridge, and bolted with it. It was done so quick, and he disappeared so fast, that no definite description can be got of his appearance. The purse was found in the gutter above John Knox's Corner, but the money was gone. Now, Jimmy, there were pound notes as well as money in the purse, and on these notes are numbers and marks by which we would know them again. What I want you to do is to go in there and watch if any of the boys appear particularly flush of money. If you spot any one who spends a deal on spice and oranges, get in tow with him, and try to draw him out. If you discover anything, come out and let me know. If I showed my nose in the place it would spoil all. Now, do you understand it all?"

"Oh, yes," I answered, with some excitement and determination; "I'll find him out if he's there."

He slipped a penny into my hand, and in another minute I was inside.

What the "play" was that night I cannot tell, for I saw none of it. I was watching the audience, which was neither select nor numerous. I changed my seat at least a dozen times, and at last found myself in the front row, beside a big-boned boy—a regular "keelie," who munched persistently at almond-cake and oranges, which he replenished as fast as they disappeared. He had lots of money—shillings and half-crowns; and I even fancied I got a glimpse of a yellow half-sovereign in his dirty paw as he paid for the sweetmeats. Presently his eye caught mine, and with a lordly air he offered me half an orange. I

shuddered and shrank back. His arm dropped by his side in his astonishment, and then I saw something like the corner of a bank-note peeping from the corner of his waistcoat pocket.

I don't know what prompted me, but the moment I saw it I made a sudden grasp at it, saying—

“ Len's a bit paper to licht my pipe.”

A stinging blow on the ear made me drop the roll of notes—for such they were—on the floor, and for a moment there was a commotion and altercation, which threatened to end in us both being expelled. At last I slunk away, rubbing my ear, and apparently in the sulks, got out of the place, and reported all to M'Dermott.

Then we arranged the plan of capture. I was to get forward to my old seat beside the thief, and the moment the detective appeared, collar him.

My ear was still tingling with the blow I had received, and the moment I saw M'Dermott within the door, I sprang like a bloodhound at the young ruffian's throat, crying—

“ Ye're catched now, so ye may as well gie in !”

A thousand lights danced before my eyes as I uttered the words. His fist had caught my nose, and the blood flowed freely ; but I stuck to him like a leech, rolling over and over with him on the floor, till M'Dermott tore him off, and held him fast. Then he was taken off to the police-office, I, with my face flushed scarlet and my nose twice its natural size, accompanying them, and a great crowd following in the rear.

Proud was I that night when I walked home, accompanied by M'Dermott, and stood before my mother with my disfigured face, and then placed in her hand the shilling I had earned, along with a bright half-crown which the great Lieutenant himself had given me. But prouder still was I when I listened to the praises of the detective, and heard him say that she would one day be proud of me. From that night my fate was fixed—I was determined to be a detective.

The money recovered was identified ; the thief got two months' imprisonment, and five years in a reformatory ; and I, in due course, got the four shillings promised.

I have mentioned this trifling incident, because when, years after, fortune or misfortune drifted me into the police force, and then made a detective of me, its simple bearings had a great influence on my own plans of working. This is how I reasoned : a simple act of kindness made me—a timid “ wee sprugg ”—not only assist M'Dermott, but fight like a lion as well ; therefore,

might not I, by a similar attention to trifles, secure "assistants" whom no money could purchase? Whether the reasoning was sound or not may perhaps crop out in the course of these sketches.

After the little affair I have mentioned, I was able to assist the detectives in several other cases, till my general sharpness and familiar intercourse with these dreaded emissaries of the law became noticed, and I was dubbed "Wee Jimmy, the Fief-catcher's Doug." There was a slight sneer conveyed in the *sobriquet*; but what cared I? Did not the biggest boy in the Canongate quail before my eye, as if I could have swallowed him alive? That was something.

Shortly after this I was sent to work, and another case came in my way which I have a reason for noticing here. A Mr Smith, hosier and draper in the High Street, engaged me at two shillings a-week to run on errands. One day, while dusting some parcels in the back shop, I was called sharply to the front, and found my master making up a "sight" of goods for a young woman having the appearance of a domestic servant. Of course I was to go with her, carry the parcel, and bring back whatever was not required. An unusual excitement about my master did not escape my eye, and I received the solution when he placed the parcel in my hand, and whispered—

"Don't let them out of your sight—she is a thief."

I pricked up my small ears at once, and with a quick look of intelligence, followed her out of the shop.

We got as far as West Register Street, and then she suddenly pulled up.

"Ah! he's forgotten to put in the worsted jackets."

"No, he hasna," I stoutly replied: "I saw 'um pit them in."

"Come into this entry and see, before we go any further," she persisted.

I went just within the entry mouth, and warily opened the parcel. The moment it was undone, she tried to plunge her hands in among the soft goods, but I caught her wrist and held it fast.

"My e'en's as good as yours," I said: "I can look mysel' "

"Come further into the shade—the people will see us here," she said, fidgeting uneasily, and trying another tack. "They'll wonder at it."

"Let them wonder; it'll no dae us ony harm," I philosophically replied. "There's the jackets; dae ye believe me now?"

She scowled and sulked while I made up the parcel, but of course that did not disturb me. Then, evidently giving it up as a bad job, she said—

“You know where we are going to?”

“Yes—Mrs White’s, 10 York Place.”

“Well, you can just go along yourself, and tell them I’m gone to order the groceries.”

I went, but found no Mrs White, nor any one who had ordered a sight of goods, and then hastened back to the shop. My parcel was all right, but my master had not been so fortunate. Two chemisettes, a pair of gloves, and six pairs of cotton stockings, had vanished from the counter and shelves. The police were informed, and a description of the thief taken down; but nothing came of it till more than a week after, when I met her full in the face at the corner of Bank Street. She cowered a little, but hurried on; and as there was no policeman in sight, I began to follow her, in hope of meeting one on the way. She looked round once, but as I took advantage of every jutting corner or open stair to conceal myself, I need scarcely say that she caught no glimpse of me.

At last she reached and entered a little broker’s shop in the Pleasance, and in a fever of excitement and dread lest I should lose her after all, I was just in the act of bribing a boy with a penny to run for a policeman, when who should turn the corner but M’Dermott himself. I fairly leaped with joy, and, after a moment’s explanation, he was into the shop with me, and had her by the shoulder.

He smiled lightly as she turned round her face, and then said, with the utmost coolness—

“Ah, Meg, is it you again? Come away—I’ll carry your bundle for you. How will Jim Maclusky do without you?”

She scowled viciously, particularly at my diminutive self, but followed us with an erect head and a look of profound contempt and defiance.

A crowd soon gathered at our heels, and just as we turned into Nicolson Street, one of the passers-by, a man whose face I could never forget, started right back with a sharp oath, and cried—

“What, Meg! nabbed again?”

The man was handsome—I may say very handsome—with curly black hair, and fierce flashing eyes—and young, too—not above twenty-four; but there was an evil look about his face that chained my eyes to it. I think the instinctive shudder

that ran through me must have been noticeable in my face, for M'Dermott touched me lightly on the shoulder, and, smiling down on me, said—

"Well, Jimmy, did you notice that man?"

"Yes, sir; who is he?"

"Jim Maclusky, one of the cleverest villains that ever trod God's earth," he replied in an under-tone, speaking down into my ear. "When I nab him, Jimmy, I'll send your mother half-a-crown out of my own purse!"

His earnest look thrilled me through.

"When I am a detective, I'll help you," I said, after a moment's thought.

He smiled.

"Then you still cherish that idea?"

I nodded.

"Ah, but you see, Jimmy, he never does anything himself; he has always some unfortunate cat's paw to pick out his roasted chestnut for him. You see?"

"Yes; I have read about it—the monkey and the cat. I've seen the picture of it, too, over in Princes Street," I replied, with a thoughtful look. "But somebody might come ahint the monkey, and catch it by the ear, and gie't a thrashin'."

He laughed long and heartily.

"Exactly; that's just what I want to do," he returned, "only the monkey is so precious cunning that I can never catch him at it."

In due time the shoplifter was tried, and sentenced to six months' imprisonment; and for a long time after that I lost sight of M'Dermott.

One day I was trotting along on one of my errands, down the Meadow Walk, when I saw a pale shadow of a man advancing towards me, leaning heavily on a stick, and occasionally pausing to cough painfully. His left arm was in a sling, bound stiff and straight with splints; and as the face seemed familiar to me, I went close up to him, and then our eyes met, and I recognised M'Dermott. A wan smile lighted up his face as he extended his hand, and I clasped it tight in both of mine, impulsively kissing it, with the sympathetic tears standing thick in my eyes.

"Ah, Jimmy, you see what it is to be a detective. I'm afraid I am fairly booked now."

"You've been ill, sir; oh, I'm very sorry for you."

"I've been ill, and I am ill; and I am afraid I'll never be any better."

"Some one hurt you? Oh, I wish I had seen them try it!" and my small fists were clenched and shaken meaningly.

"Yes, some of my ribs fractured. They won't mend again, Jimmy; it's that that troubles me. The arm is nearly right again now. You know what the lungs are?"

"Yes; what make you cough."

"Exactly. Well, mine are hurt somehow with the fractured ribs."

"And who did it?"

"That's the worst of it. It was done in the dark, and I cannot tell. But I can almost swear one man wasn't idle while I was being hurt."

"Who was he?"

"Do you remember the man who called out to us in the street, when we were taking that woman to the Office?"

"Yes—Jim Maclusky."

"You've a good memory, Jimmy. Well, that was he."

"And why cannot he be punished—hanged or something—for it?"

"Because we can't prove it. One man was caught and punished for his share in that and other things, but he was only one of the 'cat's paws' I told you about. We can't touch Maclusky. We must prove everything."

"That's very hard, when you know he did it," I said, reflectively. "I wish—oh, I wish——"

"What, Jimmy?"

"Ah, you would only laugh at me. When you get strong, I'll tell you what I was thinking; and I hope that will be soon. Now I must run. Good-bye, sir," and I was off like a shot.

M'Dermott's fears were not ill-founded. About a year after, I read the following notice in the *Scotsman's* obituary column:—

"At his residence, Bristo Street, on the 12th inst., Robert M'Dermott, of the Edinburgh detective force, after a long illness—deeply regretted."

What I did behind that paper, when I read the above, is known only to myself. But after a bit I thought something, and in my own small way made a resolve about something in connection with Jim Maclusky; and whether anything came of it may appear by-and-by.

About ten years after this event, when the "wee sprugg" had developed into a sizeable man, I was thrown out of employment by the death of Mr Smith; and as I was heartily sick of selling stockings and gloves, I readily embraced an offer to enter the police force. It is true I did feel queer for a time, parading the

streets in blue cloth and bright buttons ; but the feeling began to wear off wonderfully soon, and it vanished altogether when I was placed on the detective staff. And though the romance which had gilded the profession to my youthful eyes was pretty well rubbed off, something told me that I had found a better sphere for my abilities.

I have noticed Maclusky particularly. He was brought vividly before me while I was young; and as he was still to the fore, and as active as ever when I entered the staff, I had good reason to spot him out among the drifting mass of criminals infesting Edinburgh. By some uncommon turn in the scales of fortune, he had been limned and caged for seven years; but as thieves, like hunted hares, almost invariably make for their old haunts, his term was no sooner completed than we began to be bothered with traces of his handiwork, while he was flaunting through the streets, dressed in the height of fashion, shaking the young growth of his glossy curls at us, and wreathing his thin lips with his evil smile at our confusion. Here is the first of his affairs that I had to do with :—

“House broken into in North Castle Street—quantity of plate and valuables removed. Macgregor, No. 17. Go and see after it at once.”

The above was a slip from the lieutenant, sent to my residence, and placed in my hand while I was at breakfast. I shoved back my chair, tugged on my boots, and was off at once.

I knew the house, for Mr Macgregor was a testy old bachelor, who was never done making complaints to the police.

The entire household consisted of two domestic servants, a nervous old lady who acted as housekeeper, and Mr Macgregor himself.

I was shown into the old man's presence, and was not surprised when I was announced as “Mr M'Govan, of the detective staff,” to find myself greeted with a torrent of abuse, and to hear myself and my compeers cursed to the remotest generation.

“What do I pay police-money for? Is it to feed a cursed, lazy lot of crawling sleepy-heads, who allow thieves to walk in right under my nose, and rob me of my dearest possessions—antique cups and coins, that I would not take a fortune for? Oh, — — —.” Each of the scores represents nearly a score of oaths; and so on, *ad infinitum*.

I had to stop him at last.

“If you wish to recover your property, you had better show me over the premises at once. Where was the plate kept?”

"In the glass case in the library."

"Whew!" I whistled right out in his face. "Why didn't you keep it in a safe?"

"Because it was not convenient for showing them off. I got a safe, but I only had them in it once—when the sweeps came; but after that I made the chimney do without sweeping, and no one ever got into the room except the servants to dust."

"How did the thieves get in?"

"By the green and wash-house—curse them. I'll show it you—this way. Oh, may every bone in their bodies rot into petrified ashes! May——" More oaths.

"Ah, I see."

One pane in the wash-house had been covered from the outside with brown paper, smeared with pitch; one drive of the hand, and an arm could be introduced; the fastening undone, and then the rest was easy. Some indentations in the soft ground outside made me open the window, jump out and examine them closely. I made out the footprints of a man—one wearing a pair of very deep heels.

Only one man of my acquaintance had a weakness for high heels, and that was Jim Maclusky; and my thoughts no sooner reverted to him than I gave the plate up for lost: a visionary melting-pot instantly swallowed it before my eyes.

One thing struck me as peculiar. The ground had been soft and muddy, the feet had stamped it deeply, yet not a trace of a muddy footstep was to be found on the floor within.

"What are the characters of your servants?" I inquired at last.

"Oh, good enough, for that matter; but of course I shall discharge them both."

"You are often changing your servants, I believe. Had these two any followers?"

"No, no; never allow such a thing. Take sure means to prevent that: the housekeeper locks all the doors every night at eight o'clock."

"The burglar must have known two things: first, that you had such valuables; and, second, where they were kept. Now, unless any circumstance occurs to you by which the information could be gained, I must suspect your servants of at least supplying it."

"Ha! one thing does occur to me. About a month ago I was showing two of the cups to a friend, and in order to allow him to admire the curious carvings, I took them to the window,

and for some time held them up to the light. When he had finished inspecting them, I was about to turn away from the window, when I caught sight of a man standing on the pavement outside, with his eyes fixed upon the cups with a greedy, sinister expression. I thought nothing of it at the time, thinking that, like me, he was an admirer of such things; but—

“What was the man like?” I interposed. “About the medium height? very handsome? not much above thirty? glossy black hair, hanging in curls all round? and fine flashing black eyes?”

At every one of these queries Mr Macgregor cried “Yes!” with increasing surprise; and then added, breathlessly, “You know the man, then?”

“Yes; but I’m afraid you’ll never get back your plate.”

“Not get it!” he echoed, paling with apprehension, and then flushing crimson. “You must get it! I will give you twenty shillings—one pound—no, twenty-one—one guinea—the moment it is safe back in my possession.”

“Call your two servants,” I said drily, paying no attention to his munificent offer.

The servants were called; but, though they were pale and shaky, I got little out of them. Besides, I was in a hurry to get away, for I had still a faint hope of being able to keep the plunder out of the melting-pot.

I left the house, and in about three-quarters of an hour we managed to pounce on Maclusky. But when I saw him smile, and cheerfully draw on a pair of well-blackened boots, with low heels, and found that our most diligent search could reveal no trace of either plate, high-heeled boots, melting-pot, or tools, I knew that we were only wasting time—that he was as safe as ourselves.

His sneering taunts on the way to the office roused and goaded me into activity; and in a few hours every slum, thieves’ den, and known receiving-house in the city, had been searched. But it was in vain; and the next morning I had the chagrin of seeing him walk out of the police-court, and smiling into my face as he bade me good day.

A few days after, I was strolling leisurely up St David Street, when I saw a servant girl trying in vain, with the assistance of a boy, to get a heavy trunk up the steps in front of one of the common stairs.

“Your box seems heavy, lassie?” I said, familiarly, putting aside the boy, and taking the handle. “Let me gie ye a lift.”

She looked into my face, and then I recognised the younger of Mr Macgregor's servants.

"Na, it's no sae heavy; only that's sich a useless creatur," she returned, indicating the boy. "If ye had only felt the wecht o' Jeanie's; it near ruggit the airms aff me. We brought it along first; but then she had to gang oot some way, and I had tae get a laddie to help me with mine."

"Then you are still to be together?"

"Yes, he gied us a month's pay, and tell't us to gang; we were gled to git away frae the deevil; we can see our sweethearts now."

"Sweethearts! I thought you had none?"

"Ay, he thocht that; but Jeanie has ane. She sees 'um every Sunday—a rale bonnie chap, wi' black curly hair, an' sich a swell! I've nane yet, but I'll sune get ane."

A strange start had run through me.

"How long has she known him?" I asked, with apparent indifference.

"Oh, no sae very lang—aboout a month. But she says they're to be mairrit sunc."

I said nothing, for we were at the door; but we got the box into the kitchen, and I saw another standing there, freshly unroped. I took it by the handle, and tried its weight. It was light—quite light; and I turned to the girl in surprise.

"I thought you said it was heavier than yours?" I said, rather sharply.

"So it is, by a long chalk."

"It is not. Try it."

She did so; and then sat down on her own box, with an air of perfect bewilderment.

"Go', that's funny! I'm sure it was heavier—far heavier—than mine when we brocht it up."

I tried the lid. It was locked.

"My key fits it," she cried readily. "Let's look in an' see if she's ta'en onything oot. She'll never be a bit the wiser."

Simple, unsuspecting girl! How little did she know what a weight of guilt that trifling act was destined to lift from her own shoulders!

"Did you ever see this sweetheart of hers?" I asked, as she put the key in the lock.

"No me," she answered, with a slight toss of the head. "I think she was feared he wad fa' in love wi' me, for she would never gie me an introduction."

What a pity! I thought it, and felt it.

The box was opened, and she unscrupulously shoved in her arms and turned over the contents. As she did so, her face suddenly whitened, and my heart gave a bound. She had pulled to the surface a small canvas bag, neatly tied up and labelled, and evidently stuffed tight and with heavy coins.

One—two—three more were brought to the light, and one opened with nervous haste, and the ancient coins, gold and silver, lay revealed.

The girl dropped on her knees, and with a wild burst of sobbing, threw her arms round my legs.

"Oh, sir! I am innocent—I am innocent! Believe a puir mitherless lassie—I kent naething o' this!" she cried.

"I know you didn't. Don't cry, like a good girl, but help me to look for the plate."

We looked; but of course it was gone.

"How long is it since Jeanie went out?"

"I dinna ken; I was away for my box at the time."

"Did she say where she was going?"

"Someway oot at the Sooth Side."

"Ah, I thought as much—to Jim Maclusky's, no doubt; and took the plate with her, now in the melting-pot. Do not stir till I return."

People must have thought me mad as I dashed down the street and threw myself into a cab.

"Drive to the Cowgate Head as for life or death!"

How that thing did rattle over the stones! I was there in no time.

"Wait," I said, as I leaped out and flew forward.

But I was suddenly pulled up. Just as I approached the mouth of the close, a young woman was approaching it from the opposite direction, bearing a heavy parcel.

I recognised her at once—Jeanie Drummond, Macgregor's servant; and she screamed out at the sight of my flushed face and flying figure. The parcel dropped at her feet with a clanking, metallic sound, and was in my arms in a moment.

"Jeanie, you must come with me."

She fainted right away, and I had to get her carried into the cab.

But when she recovered consciousness, and we arrived at the Office, not a word would she speak to criminate Maclusky, or even to implicate him in the slightest degree. No entreaties, promises, or persuasions could move her; she remained stubbornly silent to the end. Of course he was arrested again;

but what could we do to him? He got off scot-free, while the poor infatuated girl—the luckless “cat’s paw”—got five years’ penal servitude.

But I have often wished—oh, so fervently!—that I had been a trifle later,—even though Mr Macgregor’s plate had gone into the pot, just that I might have caught two instead of one.

I suppose this thought prompted me to put the following scribble at the foot of the notes from which I have taken the above:—

“Mem.—At whatever cost, and though it should take a lifetime to accomplish, trap Jim MacLusky.”

LEFT HER HOME.

"YOURS is a hardening life," said an old lady to me one day. "Everything about it tends to make you harsh, cruel, and unfeeling."

She was wrong; but I knew her too well to try to correct her notion. In case the reader, however, should entertain the same idea, I give the following case, simply as it came under my notice, and it is only one of many. Within the stern and forbidding exterior implied in the words "Police Office," the extremes of every phase of life meet and jostle each other—scenes of tenderest feeling and most touching pathos, as well as aspects of the darkest guilt and overwhelming passion. Life goes drifting past us in a seething troubled stream; but here and there a floating waif throws out a cry which thrills us through, and reminds us that we are human after all.

"£5 REWARD.—Mary Cameron, aged 17, left her home at S——— on the 10th of September, and has not since been heard of. She has dark hair and eyes, a mole on the outside of the left hand, and is good-looking. Any information regarding her will be gratefully received, and the above reward paid, by John Cameron, labourer, S———."

The above advertisement—one of a kind that is never missed by the eye of a detective—was being read aloud from the *Scotsman*, and commented on by us up at the Central Office, early one morning, while we were waiting for orders for the day. We were clustered together, with the damp newspaper held up in our midst. I was the only one who remained silent. Simple and terse as was the wording of the advertisement, it had taken a strong hold of my mind. I fancied I saw in it a complete little domestic history. In the first place, I reasoned, five pounds to a "labourer"—especially a country one—is no small sum. It might be the savings of a lifetime, wrung from the world by hard toil; and yet it was cheerfully offered for any tidings of the missing girl. And it was no mercenary, cautious paragraph, such as contain stipulations about "conviction of

the offender," or "upon recovery of the property." "For any information," £5 were to be paid, and the tidings "gratefully received" into the bargain. The advertiser must be a father at least, and the missing girl perhaps the sun of his little world—all his wealth, all that he thought worth living for. Yet he was poor. Strange, grinding poverty does not stamp out that good and beautiful part of our nature, that soft, warm spot in our hearts that makes the whole world kin. Some such reflection was crossing my mind, when the entrance of an old man, a stranger, evidently puzzled as to his whereabouts, drew me away from the noisy group. His dress was poor and homely; but there was something about his furrowed face, full, flashing grey eye, and general bearing, that at once impressed me favourably, and I bowed instinctively to the Man.

"Could I see the superintendent?" he asked, with a slight quiver in his voice.

I hesitated.

"Is it absolutely necessary that you should see the superintendent? Would not the sergeant do as well?" I asked.

He tried to get out an answer, but I saw that his utterance had suddenly become choked; then he tugged at his pocket, and pulled out a copy of the very paper my comrades were reading, folded to show the advertisement I have given, and held it out to me with a shaking hand.

I understood him at once, and led him away to the sergeant, who entered the case in his book in silence.

"Maybe I've come ower sune?" said the old man; "but if ye kent the sair heart that I've carried about wi' me a' nicht, ye wad excuse me. They were very kind to me at the paper office last nicht, an' though they said I was lang past the time, they took doon the types, to pit in the advertisement. Then, as there was nae sleep for me, I've walked the streets ever since, till I thocht it was time to come here."

"You are not a bit too soon," cheerily returned the sergeant. "You could have come in at any hour. We shall be glad to do all we can for you. Just step into that room with Mr M'Govan, and tell him all about her. If she is in Edinburgh, I daresay he'll find her for you."

The old man impulsively stretched out his hand right over the book, and grasped that of the sergeant. The tears had gathered thick in his eyes, and his lips moved; but only a choking gurgle came forth. The hand had to do the talking. The sergeant was visibly moved; and I was no less affected.

"Oh, sir!—if—if—you only—kent hoo I loved that bit lassie! I could 'a' smiled at ony misfortune but this; it's like tearing the very heart oot o' me!" and then great sobs shook his stalwart frame, and drowned the rest.

I led him into another room, got him to sit down, and then by degrees drew from him his story.

"She's oor only bairn; and we've tended her, an' watched her, an' shielded her, like a tender flower, till she was grown up to be a fine woman—as bonnie and loving as she was guid—when a' at ance a change cam' owre her. She grew dowie an' sad. A' the sweethearts that wad 'a' kissed the very ground she walked were negleckit; she wadna see ane o' them, and seemed to shudder at the very mention o' their names. Her mother spoke to her—implored her to confide a' to her; but that only made her waur. She grat, and grat—we heard her in the night time—till her bonnie een were fair sunk in her heid, and shone oot on us wi' a waeful lustre that was like runnin' a knife through me. Twa mornin's after that, she was gane. Yesterday mornin' she was to have tell't her mother a; but when mornin' cam', her bed was empty—had never been lain on. The window was open—naething disturbed or ta'en away; but my bairn—my only bairn—had left me!" and he stopped suddenly and covered his face with his hands, while his whole frame shook with the effort to suppress his emotion.

"Then you suspect," I interposed, with some hesitation, "you suspect that some one has seduced and ruined her?"

"I tried tae fecht against the idea," moaned the old man, without raising his head, "nicht after nicht, week after week, till she left us; and now I think my fears maun have been owre true."

"Have you any idea who the villain was?"

"I canna say that I hae. There was a smart, foppish sort of a chield—a stranger in this place—cam' about her for a while; but he left twa-three months syne."

"Did she ever write to him after?"

"I suspected that she did; and before I came in last night, I went to the post-office, and found that she had often posted letters—sometimes twa or three in a week—addressed to 'Mr Harrison, General Post-Office, Edinburgh. To be called for.'"

"Did she ever get any replies—letters in return?"

"Nane; I'm certain o' that. I think that had preyed on her mind; and her—her situation—and——"

"I understand," I said, to save him from speaking the

humiliating words. "Well, Mr Cameron, to be candid with you, I think it possible—nay, probable—that your daughter has gone further from home than Edinburgh. Glasgow would be a more likely place. Still, she might have come in here, in the vain hope of meeting the scoundrel who has shrouded himself so well. His letters, now lying, in all probability unopened, at the Post-office, may reveal something. But even if she has gone away, if she is the tender-hearted girl you have described, she will probably return. Wickedness is a rough road, and hurts the feet unaccustomed to treading it. So, even if we do not hear immediately of her whereabouts, we may come across her by and by."

"Oh, sir! if ye should—if ye should see her, tell her a' will be forgi'en—that no a single word, no a look will reproach her; and in oor wee bit hame, she'll be as safe frae the cruel jibes of the warld as if she was in heaven itsel' Tell her that her—mother—her mother—wull tak' her to her bosom, an' shield her like the shorn lamb; an' her faither—her faither—her—" and choking sobs filled up the rest.

"I had a mother myself once," I at last managed to say, "and if I see her I will not fail to give her a mother's message—one that will get at her heart."

"Oh, bless ye—bless ye, sir!" he cried, taking both my hands in his own, and looking upwards with streaming eyes. "May Heaven's choicest gifts be showered on your head. Dae that—dae that, an' restore her to these auld airms, an' I'll work for ye nicht an' day, as lang as there's a breath in my body!"

I don't know what I said in reply; but after some further converse, and arranging of plans, he left, and we set to with a will to hunt out his daughter.

Some very smart and clever people may think that the promised five pounds had quickened us into alacrity, and these I will allow to chuckle over their superior penetration, without attempting to put them right. However, hunt we did, and well; but we did not find her. She was not in any house of questionable character known to us, nor was she seen about the streets or common haunts of these characters. This did not surprise me; nor did I therefore set it down that she was out of Edinburgh. It is true, she had no means of livelihood—had no trade at her finger-ends—but had been reared in idleness, and petted and indulged to an almost pernicious extent by her fond parents; and with hunger and shame pressing her on, she might take the frightful step. But that was a bare possibility. She

was a girl of fine and tender feelings, affectionate disposition, and a warm and generous heart; her education had been good, and the home training of her mind nearly all that could be desired. I only wish I could give some of the letters we found lying at the Post-office. They would have moved a heart of stone.

Now, such girls do not readily become waifs. Of those drifting unfortunates, who bubble up to the surface, hang out their bravest smiles for awhile, disappear for ever, and are replaced by others, the prevailing traits are ignorance and sensuality; mind, and the fine warm pulses of our nature are wanting. Some exceptions, of course, there are, but they are few.

So, after we had forwarded a description to the principal towns, and searched our own city in vain, we had to conclude that she was either dead, or too well hidden for us to get at her. Then, as other concerns came in, and weeks passed away, the subject gradually became effaced from my mind. But this was not the end of it.

One snowy night, a few months after, and pretty far on in the winter, in coming up the North Bridge at a late hour, I was accosted by what I took for one of these nameless waifs.

A kind of sharp, despairing ring in the tone of her voice made me stop and look into her face. The face was strange to me. It was one that had been beautiful, but it was now white and pinched—bringing out into strange relief the soft brilliance of her lustrous black eyes. There was no smile, no paint, no flaunting finery; but in their place, a woe-begone look, which even her restless despair could not hide; and the stern words which were rising to my lips softened before they escaped me.

“Do not you know that I am one of the police, and could take you up for this?” I said.

“What care I?”

Only three words; but what a depth of misery and utter destitution was conveyed in them! They thrilled straight into my inmost heart. I advanced a step closer.

“My poor girl, are you really in want?” I said, with gentle concern.

She looked up with a great start of surprise, swayed slightly for a moment, then covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears. Then in a moment she had sunk on her knees on the pavement before me, and hysterically clasped me round the knees.

“Oh, sir!—oh, sir!” she sobbed; “these are the first kind words I’ve heard for such a long weary, weary day.”

I raised her from the ground, and tried to soothe her; but she still sobbed, with her face buried in her hands.

"You are a stranger to this life," I said; "what has brought you to it?"

"Nothing—no one—myself alone!"

"Have you no friends?"

"None, none! Who would own me?"

"What is your name?"

"Name? I have no name now!"

"Have you no mother? No——"

A short, sharp cry had interrupted me.

"Hush, hush!" she said, looking fearfully round, with every tear instantly dried, and her face whiter than the snow falling around us; "do not breathe that name. It will strike me dead. Sometimes it comes in on me in the night, and I think I shall go mad; then I shut it out, but it comes back, and I moan and pray that the end were come. It must be pleasant to die. I would kill myself, but I am bound to earth. It is not for myself that I have come to this—no, no! death, sweet death, sooner than that. But there is another, dearer to me than all the treasures of earth or heaven. To save it, shield it, I will sell my immortality!"

She was shrinking away as she finished, but I detained her, while I thrust my hand in my pocket, pulled out the first money I touched, and placed it in her hand.

"Take it, and welcome," I said, with an emotion I should not like to have shown elsewhere. "But tell me, would you not like to go to a place where you would be both cared for and helped out of the horrible mire into which you have sunk, and enabled to grow up useful and happy?"

"Too late! too late!" she cried, with deep despair. "If I entered such a place I would bring down the curse of Heaven upon it. The die is cast—I am lost for ever! As I have fallen, so let me lie. Heaven reward you!"

She was off like a flash, and had turned down into the High Street, and disappeared, I knew not whither, before I well knew that she was not at my side.

A few days later, a most audacious street robbery was committed in Princes Street, in broad daylight, and in due course reported at the Office. Two ladies had been standing in front of a fashionable draper's shop, and one of them had just taken a sovereign from her purse, and was handing it to her daughter to make some trifling purchase, when a poorly-clad woman started forward, snatched the coin from her, and in

an instant had disappeared. The only description we could get of the offender was that she was young, and had peculiarly lustrous eyes, and a wild, frenzied look.

It ran in my mind that the description suited some one I had lately seen, but it took some time and thinking to couple it with the poor waif of a few nights before; and even then I was by no means sure they were one.

Still, as the affair had been promptly reported, and the appearance of the culprit was peculiar, I thought that the scent might not yet be lost, and at once started for the scene of the robbery. She had rushed up St David Street, and disappeared. To that street, therefore, I bent my steps. I got to the top of it without coming on any likely loungers or loiterers, and then brightened as I caught sight of a knot of street porters, waiting at their stand at the corner of St Andrew Square. I crossed over, and addressed the sharpest looking among them.

"Have you been here long?"

"A' morning, except a wee while, when I was awa' gettin' a nip."

"I suppose you didn't notice, about an hour ago, a woman, rather wild looking, with black shiny eyes and tangled hair, rushing up that side from Princes Street?"

The man shook his head.

"I never saw her; she hadna passed when I was here."

"Was she gey young like?" inquired another of the men.

"Yes, quite young—little more than a girl," I answered, with quick eagerness.

"Was she greetin'?"

"N—no—not that I know of. Why? Did you see her?"

"I saw ane gey like her doon in Queen Street; but that's mair than an hour ago."

"How much more?"

"Oh, aboot twa hours ago."

"In what direction was she going?"

"She was coming away from Professor ——'s door. The door was shut on her jist as I was passin', an' she was greetin' like to break her heart."

"You're sure it was Professor ——'s?"

"Perfectly sure."

After a few more questions, I walked off towards Queen Street, and got to the Professor's. A smart-looking servant lass opened the door, and I began to question her at once.

"Did a frenzied-looking young woman, with black hair and shiny eyes, and poorly dressed, call here about two hours ago?"

"Yes, she has been here twice."

"What did she want?"

"She wanted the Professor to go and see her child;" and a kind of guilty flush crossed the girl's face as she spoke. Her hesitation did not escape me. I felt sure there was more.

"Well; what then?"

"I told her to go to the Dispensary, for—for—"

"For what?" I said it with a quick stamp of the foot that brooked no delay.

"For he didn't attend poor people."

I knew the Professor well, and I am afraid I whitened with anger.

"Do you not know," I said, hotly, "that if your master heard of your harshness and thoughtless cruelty it would cost you your place?"

She blushed deeper, hung her head, and said nothing.

"Well? You said she was here twice. What brought her back?"

"The same errand—only this time she had a sovereign in her hand, and implored me to take it up to my master, and tell him to come, for God's sake, as he was the only man who could save her child."

The scene must have been a touching one, for tears stood in the girl's eyes at the mere recollection of it, and I saw that she was not bad, but only thoughtless.

"Well; what then?"

"I felt for her *then*, for she spoke so piteously, and I took her address and gave it to the Professor whenever he came. I dared not take the money to give him, for I was afraid of a row."

"You deserved one. Go on."

"The Professor ordered the carriage back at once, without even waiting for lunch, and drove off like fury to see her."

"Have you the address now?"

"No, he took it with him; but I remember it perfectly. It was, 'Fountain Close, High Street, the top flat of the second stair.'"

"Very good; thank you; I hope it will be a lesson to you in future."

I left Queen Street, and made for the High Street with very strange feelings. I had stumbled unexpectedly on a very unpleasant task. I was on my way to arrest a thief; but then the

circumstances attending the crime had a wild pathos about them that touched me to the core of the heart. But the law recognises no such thing as feeling. I was its paid servant, and to me its dictates were as inexorable as fate. There was nothing else for it: I must do, as I had done before, a thing at which my whole being shuddered.

I got to Fountain Close just as the Professor's carriage drove away from the spot, and after a long climb reached the top flat of the second stair. A strange commotion guided me along the dark passage to the right door. Screams of anguish, and the most pitiful wailings, mingled with rude attempts at consolation, greeted my ears as the door was opened; and then I saw that the garret was filled with neighbour women, who were surrounding the object of my search, and vainly endeavouring to get her to leave the room. Two of their number were gently straightening the body of a child, on a rude bed, and covering it with a white sheet. I recognised at a glance, in the moaning woman they were trying to remove, the poor waif I had met on the Bridge.

A more awful picture of grief I have never looked upon. Her long black hair had tumbled back over her shoulders, and hung down to her waist in disheveled masses, while her great black eyes, perfectly dry and tearless, shone like fire, as she struggled with the kindly arms enveloping her.

Suddenly, with a great cry and a wrench and spring, she shook them off and reached the bedside. Then dropping on her knees, she bent over the little white face and listened.

"I tell you it is not dead!" she said, snatching up the little body and straining it to her breast. "Oh, it cannot be that they should take it from me and bury it in the cold earth under the snow! It is only cold. I will warm it in my bosom, and when it wakes it will smile up in my face."

The women turned away, buried their faces in their aprons, and wept aloud.

She bent over the child again and listened. Then a curious change came over her face.

"How sound it sleeps!" she said, in a whisper of palpitating dread. "I don't hear it breathe."

She kissed the cold lips passionately, over and over again, then looked long and eagerly into the face, touched it dubiously, dropped the little form on the bed, and then, with a great scream, sprang up and fell backwards.

I sent for a cab, had her carried down and placed in it, and

drove to the Office. A sovereign I found lying on the floor, I picked up and took with me. She was put in a comfortable bed, and attended by our medical inspector; and one of the female searchers volunteered to watch and nurse her. Before another hour had passed, brain fever set in, and before night it took four women to hold her in bed. Next day the child was decently interred; and after the garret had been searched, the key was given up to the woman who had sub-let it. No inquiries or searches could give us any clue to her name or connections. Among her poor neighbours she had distinctly refused to be known; and they only alluded to her as "the lassie in the back garret." On the third day she relapsed into a heavy, still slumber, and I was allowed to see her. It was a beautiful picture. She lay on her back, white as the sheets around her, with the great masses of hair, which she had fought against them removing, spread back over the high pillows, and flowing over the sides of the bed. I could scarcely hear her breathe as I bent over her. One thing attracted my eye. It was her left hand, which lay outside the coverlet, showing on the outside a peculiar dark mole. There was nothing extraordinary in the circumstance, but it roused something in my mind; and as soon as I got back to the muster-room, I tackled my chum, M'Sweeny.

"Do you remember of us having anything to do with a young woman with a mole on her left hand?"

He scratched his head, and at last remembered the advertisement for Mary Cameron.

"You are right—it is she. I could stake almost anything on it—it is she," I said; and my opinion was confirmed, when, half-an-hour later, the woman who rented the garret she had occupied brought up to the Office a little hymn-book which she had found stowed away in a hole. On the fly leaf was written:—

"S——, 18—

"From John Cameron, to his daughter."

I telegraphed the following message to S—— on the instant:—

*"Police Office, High Street, Edinburgh,
4.30 P.M."*

"Your daughter is found. If you wish to see her alive, come here at once."

Shortly after, word was brought to me that she had awakened, and was asking for me. When I entered the room, I found her propped up with pillows, with her arms lying motionless by her side, while she faintly tried to smile me a welcome. Her eyes—I was afraid to look into them: they shone with a deep ethereal lustre that sent a pang to my heart.

“I knew you would come,” she slowly articulated. “I saw you in my dreams—good, kind man! But there was another with you. Hist!—whisper! Is he coming?”

“He will be here soon,” I said, soothingly. “He will take you home when you get well, and you will be so happy together.”

A long shivering cry escaped her, and the tears came crowding into her eyes.

“Hush! I shall never go home again.”

Ah, what a wail was in those few simple words! The look, the tone, and the weary, weary sigh, chased the idle words from my lips. At last I said—

“If you knew how he loves you—how he spoke of you!”

An awful look had come into her eyes, and her hand grasped mine like a vice.

“Don’t—don’t!” she gasped. “You will kill me!”

A revulsion came. I saw that she was becoming fearfully agitated, and I tried to rise.

“You must not excite yourself, or I shall be forced to go,” I hurriedly observed. “It is the doctor’s orders.”

“Stay—stay! I will be calm—very calm. See, I am firm now,” she cried, shaking with the effort, “only don’t—don’t leave me! You were kind to me; you did not spurn me, and kick me through the snow; and you have been so good, bringing me here, and having me so kindly watched and nursed. But where have they put my wee bairn? I dreamt—oh! I dreamt that it was dead, and that they buried it deep down, where I could not get at it. And I tore up the earth with my hands, and tried to snatch it out; but it came out and floated into the air, all shining and glorious. I watched it rising in the deep, deep blue, and it smiled down on me; and such a light was in its eyes! But why are you crying?—and the nurse, she is crying too. You are all crying.”

She paused for breath, and there was a general sound through that room; but what it was I need not say here. Her thin hands were clasped, and she murmured—

“You are crying because it is true. I am so glad. My wee

bairnie will be safe in heaven. No cold or hunger will get at it, and the snow never gets there. People will not point at it now; and I—and I——”

A sudden rushing and trampling of feet in the corridor without had caused us all to start. The door opened, a tottering old man rushed in, and with a scream she threw open her arms, and was strained to his breast.

“Faither! faither!—my ain dear faither!”

“My bairn! my bairn!—my puir, puir bairn!”

It was some time before they could bring her round, and then she lay back, with her eyes half closed, panting and gasping for breath, but with her father’s hand clasped tight to her bosom.

“My mother?” she whispered at last—“my mother?”

A choking sob was the reply, and she started up with a wild fear shining from her eyes.

“Deid! deid and gane! Her last prayer was for you,” ejaculated the old man.

She sank gently backwards, with her eyes drooping, and then a tiny crimson stream flowed from her mouth over the pillow.

He gathered her in his arms, and wiped her lips with a shaking hand.

“My bairn! my ain wee Mary!” he wildly cried; “speak to me! speak to your faither!”

“Faither!”

It was only a whisper, yet all heard it.

“Pray, lass, pray,” murmured the old man, with the tears streaming down his furrowed cheeks. “Pray after me:—Our Father—”

“Our—Father—”

“Which art in heaven.”

Fainter and slower came the response—

“Which—art—in—heaven—”

“Forgive us our sins—”

“Forgive—us—our—sins—”

“As we forgive those who have sinned against us.”

“As—we—for—give—those—sinned—against—us.”

A deep, weary sigh followed the whisper; and then we gathered round the old man, and gently forced him from the room.

Mary Cameron was dead.

The bleak winter, with its snows and storms, had melted before the soft breath of spring, and the first blush of summer was spreading greenly round our city, when I one day received

the following note, bearing the S—— post-mark, and accompanied by a heavy square parcel :—

“S——, May 21, 18—.

“Dear Sir,—My brother John, who died on Thursday morning, requested me to send you his family Bible, with his dying blessing.

“I have much pleasure in doing so, and the book accompanies this note.

“Your obedient servant,

“JAMES CAMERON.”

The immediate cause of so much desolation and suffering—Mr Edward Harrison, as he styled himself—I never discovered. Perhaps he is now married, and living happily in the bosom of his family. If so, should he see this, he has my hearty wish that the simple recital may plant a sting in his breast that will rankle there till his dying day.

M'SWEENEY AMONG BODY-SNATCHERS.

I HAVE said that nothing is too trifling for a detective's notice, and I give the following case to show how a chance remark, overheard without suspicion, and meaningless in itself, may afterwards rise to significance and importance.

I was passing the main office of the principal coach-hirer in Edinburgh, one bitter cold day in January, when a fine dashing young fellow, a student, came running down the steps and joined a companion directly in front of me. Though they had that free, devil-may-care carriage, which it seems the peculiar vanity of the medical students here to affect, they were evidently gentlemen, and I had not the slightest intention of listening to their talk, had not chance pressed it upon me—or rather me upon them. The pavement was, as usual, crowded to an uncomfortable degree with coach passengers and loiterers—the whole is an unmitigated nuisance in the finest street in the world ; and just as the two students got together, I was jostled and jammed up behind them, and thus could not avoid hearing every word.

“It's all right,” said the first. “The machine will be ready for us to-morrow night at eleven. The funeral is to be sometime in the middle of the day, so we will be in good time.”

“How far is it ?” asked the other, with interest.

“Two or three miles. I have walked out easily in an hour ; so we will go in less with the machine.”

“That'll be about twelve ?” said the other, with a mock ruefulness in his face.

“Yes ; when churchyards yawn, and graves give up their dead,” laughingly rejoined the other ; and then another lurch in the crowd separated us.

There was nothing in this brief fragment to me. I heard it perforce, but it neither interested nor aroused me ; and in another moment I was again absorbed in the work I had in hand, strolling about among the maddened crowd, and patiently receiving all their “dunts,” in the faint hope of laying hands on a stray pickpocket or two.

The next day, shortly after ten o'clock, M'Sweeny was standing in the High Street, down at the corner of the Tron, diligently whistling the "Colleen Rhua," when a little old woman, with considerable anxiety and concern in her face, tapped him on the arm.

"Can you tell me, honest man, which is the road to the Police Office?"

"Faith, I can!" responded M'Sweeny, with alacrity, his heart warming to the brogue in a moment; "just look up the street—there—that's it; but there's some I know that think they're not far from it when I'm at their elbow. You seem troubled?"

"I am troubled; but p'raps they'll only laugh at me after all, though I've walked three blessed miles this mornin' over them roads, without any breakfast, an' my poor girl, bless her sweet face, is to be buried this very day;" and the poor woman was crying now, bitterly enough.

"No, they won't," said M'Sweeny, stoutly; "see, I'll go up along wid ye. I can't offer you my arm, ma'am, for it might do ye more harm than good, 'cause women who take it are generally not able to walk alone. You must have heard of me, now? I'm M'Sweeny, the great detective;" and he paused to note the effect of the astounding announcement.

"Faith, I never did," was the simple reply. "But there's another man I was told to ax for—p'raps you'll know him? He's very sharp at finding out things."

"Ah, that's me," said M'Sweeny, with a self-congratulatory twinkle; "I'm considered sharp at findin' out things. There's another man that sometimes works in company with me—he's not bad, either—not bad in his way, ye know; but for a rale, downright, difficult job—"

"Ah, what's the other man's name?" eagerly interrupted the old woman.

"Jimmy M'Govan."

"That's it! that's the man!" cried the woman, rapturously clapping her hands. "Would you take me to where I could spake a word with him! Sure, I heard of a kindness that he once did, an' it went to my heart, an' I never forgot him since. It's him that'll help me now, and not laugh at me either."

"True for you," said M'Sweeny, putting the best face on the matter, and trying to look cheerful; "he has got a soft place about him, an' nobody knows that better than myself. We're chums, you know; an' some folks like the one of us, an'

some the other. Faix, on the whole, I believe he bates me; for he's got a nice soft wheedlin' way wid him that 'ud multaver a bird off a tree, so it would. But here's the room, an' here's the man himself, just going out; so you're not a minute too soon."

I was just going out, as he said; but I turned back, and soon settled myself to listen to the woman's story.

"My name is Tierney, and I've come in from the village of Maitland, all the way," she began, mentioning the place to which I have given the above fictitious name, "and I want to see if you can help me about my little girl, that's to be buried to-day. My good man he laughed at me when I said I felt uneasy in my mind, and said that such things were never done now-a-days; and the neighbours they laughed at me, so I could do nothing to get the weight off my mind, but come trampin' in here to see you."

I thought this rather a roundabout way of getting at her business, and, I suppose, showed my impatience, for she hastened to add—

"Whisht a minute, now, an' I'll tell ye it all. My poor girl, that was only ten last Christmas, died on Friday. She'd been long ill, poor weenock, with spine disease, an' while there was any strength in her I used to bring her in here to the Dispensary. But she got past that at last; and then the young gentlemen got so interested in her case, which they never saw the like of before, that they used to come out all that way—three miles if it's a foot—to see her, and attend her just the same. One of them—a hearty, kind-spoken young gentleman—was very kind to her, and brought her jellies and things made by his own lady mother herself. Well, the last time he was out was on Saturday; but then the poor girl was lying dead and cold. He was very sympathising; but oh, wirra, wirra! did I ever expect to hear such words from his lips? Would you believe it, sir? The very man who had been kindest to her, and always shown her the most attention, wanted to—oh, I can't get it out!"

"To dissect the body?" I interposed, as gently as possible.

"To cut it, sir—to spoil my sweet, wee angel, that was more fit for heaven than earth!" cried the mother, in horrified accents, "and all that they might find out what caused her trouble. What matter what caused it, when it has taken her away from me?" and with this last pitiful wail the tears came freely.

"Well, what did you say to him?" I asked, beginning to feel for the woman's simple grief, and half inclined to sympathise with her horror of the dissecting-knife.

"I couldn't speak at first, for he used such a power of long words that I didn't understand, and I didn't believe he could find it in his heart to do such a thing. But when I saw he was in earnest, I blazed up, and frightened him a bit, I can tell you. I never thought I had so many words at my tongue's end."

"Well, and did that end the matter?"

"No; he got earnest about it, too. He pleaded, and preached, and prayed, and offered me untold gold. He said they'd make up ten or fifteen pounds among them, or more if I wanted it, if I'd only let them examine it, which meant to cut it up, and mangle it with their knives and saws."

"And you did not consent?"

"Consent!" echoed the mother, with kindling warmth; "though they heaped a mountain of gold up before me they'd never get leave to touch a hair of my wee shamrock's head. No; though he had been so good to her, the passion so got the better of me for the moment that I was wellnigh turning him out of the house. I had given him an invitation to the funeral before that; but I hope now that he will not come."

"Why so?" I did not ask this indifferently; for there was a peculiarity about the woman's tone that told me more was coming.

"Because—oh, sir! this is what troubles me—ever since I parted with him at my cottage door, I have been haunted with a presentiment that he might come after she was buried, and steal her body out of the churchyard," and the poor mother looked anxiously into my face, evidently expecting me to laugh at the idea like the rest.

But there was no laughing in my head. I was quite as serious as herself; though by no means so certain or positive about the fact.

"Such cases are rare indeed now-a-days," I said in reply; "but they are not altogether unknown, and the anxiety of the students might really prompt them to the outrage you fear. I don't know that the thing is likely, but it is possible. Now, this being admitted, can you say what you would like us to do?"

"I don't know," was the helpless answer, given in a flutter of agitation that was pitiable to see. "But could you not watch the grave some way? They used to do that long ago, I believe, when body-snatching was a trade."

I demurred a little.

"We could do that, certainly," I said, "and we will do it, if

we find any necessity for such a proceeding. But considering the inclemency of the weather, and the distance of the place—I suppose she will be buried near you?”

“About half-a-mile from the village. There is East and West Maitland, and the same churchyard does for both. It’s a little place, quite unprotected and lonely, an’ that’s why I’m so fear’d.”

“Well, considering all things, I think that, in the first place, it would be much easier to watch the movements of the suspected parties themselves. Could you point them out to me, think you, on the street?”

“Yes, among a thousand.”

“Very well, I will give you the chance, perhaps, in a few minutes. Meantime, there is one thing more I would like. I know the little churchyard that you mention well; but can you give me any idea as to what part of it is to be used for your girl’s resting-place?”

Again the helpless look spread over her anxious face. I have seen the same look hundreds of times on the faces of the ignorant and unlettered in similar circumstances. They were perhaps bursting with eagerness to do or say something; the will, and perhaps the latent power was there; but they were sternly held back by iron trammels.

“I could show it you,” she said at last, with tears in her eyes, “if I wor there now.”

“Very well, look here,” I said, placing a sheet of white paper on the desk before her, and beginning to pencil a rough draught of the locality; “here is a round thing that will stand for West Maitland—here is another that will stand for East. This double line will be the road between, and this large square will be the burying-ground. Now, can you show me the spot?”

She brightened at once into such a smile of relief and joy!

“There,” she said, placing her finger at once on the south-east corner; there’s the spot, in the very corner.”

I placed a cross at the corner indicated, pocketed the draught, and took up my hat to go.

“Now, Mrs Tierney,” I said, “if you will accompany me as far as the front of the College, perhaps we may be able to spot out these young gentlemen who are such ardent devotees to science.”

With a burst of thanks, which lasted, I am bound to say, from the Police Office to far past the Tron Church, she obeyed, and we were very soon snugly planted in a confectioner’s shop

opposite the College, whence we could see every one passing in and out of the great gates.

By and by the medical students began to file in, and suddenly my arm was excitedly grasped by my companion, whose distended eyes were chained to an easy and *nonchalant* pair, who were sauntering up to the gate, arm in arm, puffing airily at cigars.

"There, that's them—the two!" she excitedly whispered: "and that one with the curly hair is Mr Burnet, who was so kind to her before she was taken."

I looked across at the two gents, and then came in my mind a quick succession of flashes of thought or recollection. The first look at the face of the one she had named gave me the first flash.

"I have seen that man before—lately—yesterday!" and then I remembered the students in front of the coach-office.

But by and by I remembered more. I remembered their singular words, the strange hour fixed for the machine to be ready, and some words about "churchyards yawning, and graves giving up their dead."

I must have looked stupid, vacant, forgetful, while these thoughts were rushing through my mind, for at last my companion tugged me again by the arm.

"Look at them, sir, while they're in sight; there, passing in at the gate," she cried, evidently thinking I was either dreaming or asleep, and required waking.

"It's all right," I hastened to assure her; "I have seen them now, and before."

I said no more—at least, that could have been intelligible to her—for I was busy thinking, and presently we shook hands and parted; she to trudge home, happy and contented, with the most unbounded faith in my power to protect her dead child, and I to set a safe man—M'Sweeny himself—on to watch the movements of the three students.

Some of these movements were intelligible enough to us, in the light of our information; but one of them puzzled us not a little, and not only caused us some amusement when we at last hit the clue, but called forth our unqualified admiration for the precocity of the prompting minds. Thus, when they went to an ironmonger's and bought two serviceable pickaxes, and the like number of spades (I had the pleasure of handling the tools in the shop before they were sent home), I say, when they bought these—we understood perfectly for what use they were

intended. But when they went to a haberdasher's, and, with much laughter and comical "trying on" and fitting, each got suited with a lady's long chemise, and then got fitted with huge "mutches," which could be drawn on over their fur caps and all, then we were pulled up. What could they want with women's "shifts" reaching to their heels, and caps to match? And why should they pull them on over all their clothes, and then strut about the back shop in the queer guise, dancing and yelling with laughter at each other's comical appearance?

The solution came to me through one of M'Sweeny's odd similes. While relating their proceedings, he happened to say something about "as white as a ghost, or the blessed snow on them house-tops;" and then I started and smiled. The ground out in the country, they calculated, would be white; therefore, any dark object—the form of a man, for instance—moving over it could be easily noticed, even from a distance, while the same object covered with white would be at a short distance invisible. Another object they might have in view; if any straggler did happen to come near while they were at work, he would probably take them for something supernatural, and retreat in double-quick time.

"I have got it now!" I cried, when I thought what I have now written. "And what is more, we must borrow the wrinkle from them. If we are to watch them unseen, we must have 'shifts' and 'mutches' too."

"Blood alive, but you're right," cried M'Sweeny, with uproarious delight, catching at the idea. "Mebbe they'll find more ghosts than themselves walkin' the graveyard. Ye think I'm feared for them things, but by this and by that, you'll find all the tremblin' on the other side. But where are we to get 'shifts' and 'mutches?' I don't think we'll find that illigant dress from among the rags;" by which last was meant the varied wardrobe placed at our disposal for such purposes.

This difficulty was got over very easily. My wife, unfortunately, was of too diminutive a stature to supply the required articles; but M'Sweeny's sister, Honor—a big-boned, tall woman—came as near the size as could reasonably be expected, at a short notice. By her we were fitted with a pair of ample night-gowns, with sleeves—those of the students had none—and "mutches," that for size would have held a "kail-pat." This want of the sleeves, I laid down to an oversight on the part of the students; but in the end I found I was mistaken, and that they were quite as *far-seeing* as ourselves.

The students were to start at eleven that night—I made sure of it by looking at the order in the coach-office—therefore we resolved to start about ten. Accordingly, a little before that hour, we walked out to Mayfield Loan, where we had the machine concealed, and, dismissing the boy who had brought it, drove out through the driving snow towards the Maitland Burying-Ground. One word of M'Sweeny's will describe the wintry "swish" of that drive better than pages of mine, and that was—"beastly." We were shivered to the bone, and so dead with cold, that we were glad to get out at the end of two miles, and leave the horse and machine at an inn, while we tramped on the rest of the way on "shank's naggie," carrying our "props" under our arms.

Arrived at the burying-ground, we had no difficulty in getting in, as the place was isolated, the walls low, and not a soul or a human habitation in sight. But when it came to the selection of a hiding-place, then we did not get on so swimmingly. There was not such a thing in the place. Being among the hills, the most had been made of the bit of ground ; so we found that the whole consisted of one flat, square surface, and one straight, smooth slope running very steeply down to the wall at the back. There was no open tool-house, shed, or shelter of any kind ; and though the snow had ceased, we did not care to hide *outside* the wall, as such a plan did not offer such facilities for pouncing on the amateur criminals within. At last my eye lighted on the grave-diggers' planks and sluice, which had been used only that day to hold and support the earth from the open grave ; and with these laid against the wall at the foot of the slope, I soon constructed a thing that not only concealed us, but gave us a partial view of the only grave we were desirous of watching.

These arrangements were not long concluded, our own dark lanterns lighted and covered over in readiness, and ourselves transformed into sheeted ghosts, when the rattling of wheels over the road at some distance warned us of the approach of our quarry, and sent us cowering down the slope into our hiding-place.

Rather a long pause after the stopping of the wheels drew us out again, and cautiously up the slope, to have a peep at the level surface above. The first thing we saw was the machine driving off, straight on, probably to some hiding-place before fixed on ; and then, after tossing over the tools and a large sack, we saw them get up one by one and drop over on the soft snow

The front wall was the highest, and there they chose to dress, cowering close into the corner, and talking in whispers. Their first proceeding was to throw off their coats (one of them was a good one, and afterwards lasted me many years), and don white masks. Then they drew on the "shifts" above mentioned ; and now, for the first time, I saw that the want of the sleeves was no drawback, as the sleeves of their own shirts corresponded, and completed the costume. The "mutches" were the last thing ; and then after some subdued laughter among themselves, they snatched up the tools and empty sack, and approached our end of the grave-yard. And truly, with the white masks and dark eye-holes, the three figures advancing upon us would have been no canny spectacle, had we been ignorant of all the outs and ins. Even M'Sweeny shrank back into the hiding-place rather quicker than was necessary, and confessed in a whisper that they were "like as life."

Owing to the snow having fallen so recently, they had some difficulty in finding the new-made grave ; and even when they did come on the little mound with its loose turf I was by no means sure that they were on the right spot.

"Arrah sowl, you're either wrong intirely, or the drink's got into their heads," whispered M'Sweeny. "See, they're ten feet from it, if they're wan : and, by gor, they're diggin' Them petticoats is in the way, though. Ha ! there's one down ; ondy hear him swear ; it's as good as a sarmon."

There was some very vigorous swearing, as a chemise got between one of their legs, and sent him sprawling over his own pickaxe among the snow and wet earth ; and some ringing laughter from the other two as they sprang forward, raised him as if he had been the best lady in the land, and then fanned him vigorously with their spades, as if to bring him out of a delicate swoon.

"Ah, John ; the smelling salts !" cried one, to an imaginary footman ; "don't you see the lady has fainted ;" and again the dirty, wet spade was waved close to the white mask.

"Haw, haw ! no, no !" cried the third, dancing round in mock alarm. "Bring, rather, an ice, on a silver salver ;" and suiting the action to the word, he shovelled a spadeful of snow into the face of the "lady."

"Curses on you both, for a pair of fools !" cried the "lady," shaking himself free from his tormentors. "What did you come here for ? It's running down my neck and breast now, like water," and he fidgeted uneasily to dislodge the snow.

"Aw, haw! feel the lady's pulse, doctaw," cried one of the madcaps, dancing round the hole. "Slightly feverish, I think; caught cold; out rather late in the chill air."

"Yes," answered the other, as the "lady" sulkily resumed the pick in the hole. "Too much violent exertion; will do, though; a black bolus, a warm bath, right in a day or two."

"Ah, well," returned the tormented, relaxing at last into a laugh, "I can pick for any two of you, that's one consolation. There's the coffin at last;" and as he spoke, we could hear the crash of wood, as he angrily dashed the point of the implement through the coffin lid.

All larking and chaffing was now at an end, and we could hear them seriously discussing the best plan for getting out the corpse. At last an opening sufficiently large was made in the lid, a rope passed under the armpits of the body, and the corpse gently drawn to the surface.

It looked large, even to the body-snatchers, and they stared at it for some moments in bewilderment. At last one struck a match, stooped down, held it close to the face of the dead, and then whistled aloud.

"Good heavens! you've opened the wrong grave!" he exclaimed. "It's an old man—sixty, if he's a day—and as ugly as the d——!" And as he spoke he gave the stiff, white form a disappointed kick, that sent it rolling down the slope towards our hiding-place.

"We'll secure that for evidence against them," cried M'Sweeny, slipping out, and stooping down to grasp the body.

Just as he had gone thus far, however, I saw one of them appear above, talking backwards to his companions; and I rather unguardedly shouted—

"Down!"

M'Sweeny obeyed instantly, and flopped down straight and stiff behind the body. But the student above started at the sound, and turned angrily towards his companions.

"Do you think I'm a fool?" he demanded.

"A fool!" echoed the others. "No; why?"

"Then why did you cry 'Down?'"

"I didn't!" cried one.

"Nor I!" echoed the others. "You must be dreaming."

"Am I? Don't do it again, that's all," sternly returned the first, who was the "lady." "You are rather fond of tricks to-night; but you may find yourselves in the wrong box before you're aware."

"True for you, my honey," muttered M'Sweeney, without moving, "only you'll be in it first. Look out, Jimmy!"

But the student only came half-way down the slope, and then stood staring at the two white forms, as if petrified.

"Good God! what's that? The body's turned into two!" he exclaimed; and then, after coming a little closer, to make sure, he dashed up the slope, calling loudly on his companions, who were busy hunting elsewhere for the real grave.

"Now then," I whispered excitedly to M'Sweeney, "come back again—in here—and we may pin the whole three at once."

He was just in, and no more, when the three appeared at the top of the slope, conversing hurriedly and incredulously.

"Two bodies? Impossible!" I heard one say; and then the first, as he was about to point triumphantly to the spot, was again petrified with astonishment to behold only one body.

"I could swear I saw two," he falteringly persisted, looking round on every side.

A burst of laughter greeted the words and the look.

"No doubt you did!" cried one. "The brandy has been too much for you, and you see double!"

"I see one now," he rejoined, without losing temper. "But chaff as you like, you will not make me believe I did not see two before."

"Well, well; let us get it buried again, and say no more about it," said one of the others; and raising it between them, they were soon busy repairing what they had done, by putting back the body and filling in the earth.

But M'Sweeney was anxious to satisfy himself that they were not bearing it off, and was in the act of creeping softly up the slope to see, when the first student, who was still unsatisfied, and perhaps a little roused at the unmerciful chaffing still being rattled about his ears, came poking over the slope further along, looking anxiously about in every direction. The moment he appeared, M'Sweeney was lying straight and rigid on the snow, hoping thus to be passed unnoticed.

But no. The eye of the student instantly lighted on the straight form, while his throat gave out a joyful cry that brought his companions hurrying forward, spades in hand.

"There—there! I told you there was another!" he shouted; and then the whole three descended with a rush on a white figure.

But they were chary of touching it, or even approaching it close.

"Heavens ! here is a mystery, and no mistake !" cried one, gazing blankly on his companions. "We only took one from the grave, and that one we have buried again. Where did this come from ?"

"See, too, how the legs are convulsively drawn up under the shroud ; in that form the body could never have gone into the coffin."

"Perhaps we are not the only ones in the field, and some brother in trade has left it for after removal?" suggested one, more quick-witted than the rest.

"Suppose we relieve him of the trouble, as there is no grave to put it into?" added another. And so eagerly was the proposal received that one actually stooped and touched M'Sweeny's face with his hands, preparatory to lifting his end of the body.

But it was only a touch. He started back, curious and suspicious.

"It's warm !" he said in a gasp. "Is it—is it dead ?"

"Perhaps not," gleefully shouted one of the others, clapping his hands on his breast, as if to feel for his instruments. "What a pity ! I've left them in my coat-pocket. Perhaps it's a strange case of resuscitation after a long trance. Raise him up, boys ; this case may bring us more than we expected."

The others hastened to obey ; and then M'Sweeny emitted a low groan.

"You hear !" eagerly cried the first. "Already he exhibits signs of returning animation—the brandy ! quick, the brandy !"

I verily believe that but for that potent word M'Sweeny would have instantly seized the two nearest him ; but as it was, he instantly had a relapse, till the welcome fiery liquid was poured freely down his capacious throat. Then he groaned again, and mumbled indistinctly at some words that puzzled them not a little.

"What does he say ?" said one. "I can't make it out."

"He says: 'Tell Jimmy to be ready.' Poor fellow, his mind wanders," answered the other. But before the words were well out of his mouth, "Jimmy" was ready, and had him fast by the—scruff of the neck I should say ; but unfortunately, it was only a lady's chemise, and flew away in ribbons, as he dashed from my grasp, with a yell that might have been heard a mile off.

Leaving the others to M'Sweeny, I was after him in double-quick time ; but as bad luck would have it, my legs were not only unused to running in a nightgown, but stiff and numbed with the long wait ; and, to make matters worse, a flat tomb-

stone under the snow, caught my feet, and I shot forward like an arrow, rasping my nose and chin, and considerably damaging Honor M'Sweeney's night-dress. With no very loving imprecation I was up again, and limping to the wall, which I got over for form's sake, as my quarry, I had a shrewd suspicion, was already too far off for me to hope for his capture. Over I went, with a jump, and gazed eagerly round on every side. There was the straight white road on either side, fading away into darkness, but no signs of a hurrying human figure.

"We'll have to be content with the two," was my comment, as I felt tenderly at my injured nose, and made my way back again; "for, of course, M'Sweeney would grab them both."

I got to the top of the slope, and then my heart sank within me, as I looked down and saw no prisoners, but only M'Sweeney squatting in the snow, and ruefully wiping the blood flowing from his nose with the sleeve of his night-gown.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "did you let them off?"

"They *wint* off," was the laconic answer; "sort o' sudden like. I got a clip over the nose, and then when I opened me eyes I found myself down here and nobody in sight. What have you done wid your man?"

A groan was my answer.

"The cursed night-gown—I fell over a tombstone," I began.

"And he's off? Ah! we might have expected as much," was the unsympathising rejoinder. "There's always trouble in havin' anything to do wid petticoats;" and he made another dab at his nose. "Well, if they put life in me wid the brandy, they've had the pleasure of takin' it out again. The young divils, it's only fun to them—a surgical operation they'd call it."

We were bad company for each other for some minutes, as we were both out of temper, and each disposed to throw the defeat on the other's shoulders; but by and by, in picking up the tools, we found the brandy flask, and this, with the discovery of the students' superfine fur-collared coats, in a manner consoled us; and dividing the whole between us, we trudged off to the inn, where we had left the gig.

Next day, of course, we duly arrested the three suspected students; but the unblushing scoundrels affected the most unbounded astonishment, and loudly asserted, before leaving the Office on bail, their ability to prove an *alibi*.

We scouted the idea, though, of course, we could not swear to their faces, having never seen them; but when we came to

bring the case to trial in the ordinary way, we found, at the outset, an unexpected and insurmountable difficulty. The little Irishwoman, upon whose evidence alone we had relied for a conviction, was not to be found! She had gone away, the neighbours said, quite suddenly, to live among her friends in some remote part of the sister-isle. And thus our case broke down, and the three young rascals went off, shaking their curls at us, and even offering to stand us brandy and soda. But the coats remained with us, with the contents of the pockets, and other odds and ends, as I have already hinted.

Years after, young Burnet rose in the medical profession here, and at last drifted in my way as an attendant on my little girl. Then it was that I learnt the secret of our break-down. The hand of the little Irishwoman was *crossed*—in a word, twenty pounds out of the purses of the students took her off, and spoiled our case.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

I HAVE often wondered that story-writers do not more frequently introduce cases of mistaken identity. Certainly, in real life the thing is by no means rare. I myself have met with a good many instances—some of them very comical, and some of them very puzzling. But my business here is to give a curious case, which, in better hands, might be made something of. Every one who has not actually seen it, has heard of twin love—that is, the deep and unchanging affection existing between born twins. Had I not carefully satisfied myself of the contrary, I would have believed this to be a case of the kind. But no; the affection here comes from something deep down in humanity; a something regulated or awed by no laws save those of kindness, mercy, and good will. The case mystified me at the time; but as too much mystery invariably defeats its own ends, I will try to put it down in a way that will make it considerably plainer to the reader.

One bitter cold night in January, about two hours after midnight, a youth of seventeen or eighteen staggeringly fought his way along Waterloo Place towards the Calton Hill. I do not know why he went in that direction, for the wind was blowing right in his teeth, and drifting the new fallen snow full into his eyes and mouth. I rather think he did not know where he was going. He was conscious of moving, of struggling against something, of seeing the swirling snow, deserted streets, lamps half blown out, and stray lighted windows—nothing more. He was lightly clad; but made no attempt to wrap the things closer around him.

He spoke to himself—there was no other human being in sight—as he got past the gaol, and the words came through his chattering teeth and blue lips in despairing gasps—

“I am to die. I know it. I feel it coming on. Found dead—died of starvation. It will be in the papers to-morrow. Why can I not steal something, and get in there? They have at least a bed to lie on, and a roof to cover them, while I am

out here sinking—dying by inches. Why does death come so slowly? If I had laudanum, I would take it now—now!” and he feverishly felt his pocket, as he quitted his hold of the railings, as if he half-fancied he had the poison about him.

Further along he sat down against the railings. Utter exhaustion and a strange drowsiness chained him to the stone, till he was nearly as thickly covered with snow as the ground under him. A sound—the striking of a clock, perhaps—roused him, and he slowly tugged himself up by the railings to his feet, and staggered blindly from the spot.

“I must keep moving,” he muttered. “The snow kills. But I am to die, so what does it matter? Did I dream it? or did somebody tell me? My mother—oh, my mother did not think I would come to this! I had a mother once; but then she is dead. She would have shielded me from the wind and snow.”

He was sitting again, cowering from the blast, and talking faintly to himself. By and by his half-closed eyes were attracted by some twinkling lights in the North Back Canongate, away down at the foot of the steep hill.

“Lights—warmth—shelter,” were the words that faintly shaped themselves in his mind, and once more tugging himself up, he groped along by the railings to the narrow path running down the steep slope. Half-way down he was conscious of a giddiness—a stagger—a soft fall—and then all became a blank. The wind blustered on, and the snow began to sheet the white figure, as if already sure of its prey. His spirit had fought, and fought bravely, against misfortune, hunger, and cold; but it was conquered at last. But the light-falling, treacherous snow was not to be his shroud; he was not to die yet, or I would never have known his reflections or feelings. Another figure appeared on the road above, and turned with a jaunty, careless step down into the path on which lay the still figure. There was no hurrying, groping, or muttering in this case; but in their place the cheerful carolling of a song, referring to the study of Botany in a far distant Bay, kindly provided for the purpose by Her Majesty’s Government. As a matter of course, the new comer’s feet came suddenly on the prostrate youth; and in the midst of enjoining his far-distant “pals” to “keep their pecker up,” he measured his length on the ground.

“Hallo! what are ye lying down there for?”

He had picked himself up, with some voluble cursing, and was now stooping over the other, and trying to shake him into

sensibility. There was no answer, and he hauled the stranger up on his feet, and began to thump him energetically.

"Crickey, if it isn't a young cove, just like me!" he exclaimed. "Hope he's not gone and croaked. I don't like dead men; they give me the shakers. Let's smell his breath. No; he's not drunk—not been drinkin'. Queer. I wonder what he lay down there for?"

He resumed the thumping, till the senseless youth began to make a faint resistance, and then a bright idea seemed to strike him.

"Blow my stupidity! I didn't think on the drink," he said, as he produced a flat bottle from his breast-pocket. "Now, covey, open your mouth. There—there—he's chokin' over it—that's a good sign. How d'you feel now, old fellow?"

"Leave me alone—let me die!" came in faint gasps.

"Not if I knows it. Why, you stoopid, you'd get your death o' cold lying down there. Come on—you're half asleep—do you hear? I'm shoutin' loud, so that you may hear. You're asleep, and I'm goin' to trot ye down the hill. Don't be feared, I won't let you drop. Ready now? Oh, but I say ye must. Now, then, here we go—whoop, hurrah!"

With this inspiriting shout he was off, half-dragging, half-supporting the other; and when they reached the bottom they were both in a glow.

"Now, then, open your mouth again. Ah, ye've got your peepers open now; that's good. There; don't be feared to suck it in: it's only a percooliar kind o' medicine. Ha, ha! that's a joke of mine, ye know. They say I'm a very amusin' sort o' a cove. Here—come closer to the light—so. Oh, Lor'! oh, crickey!"

"What's wrong?" asked the rescued youth in astonishment, finding his voice and tongue as the other staggered back in amazement.

"Well, blow me, if I ever see'd the like," cried the other without replying to the question, and keeping his eyes fixed on the pinched face before him. "What's your name?"

"My name is Tom—Tom Currie."

"And mine is Pete—Peter Crewe. Well, Tom, you don't seem to know it, but you're as like me as two peas. Look! and he snatched the cap from his own head, and put back the tangled hair from his brow, to allow the other the chance of a clear inspection. The resemblance was certainly striking, and Tom noted it at a glance. They had the same eyes, nose,

and mouth; the same dawning of a moustache on the upper lip; the same form and figure; and were of about the same height.

"To be sure, your face is skinnier than mine," said Pete; "but then that's p'raps for want of grub. Come on, and I'll get ye some. You're pretty weak yet, so you'd better hook on;" and he linked his arm into Tom's. "That's if you're not ashamed of me?" he reluctantly added, starting, and trying to withdraw his arm.

"Ashamed of you?" cried the other, trembling with emotion and weakness. "How could I? You saved my life just now."

The other fidgeted, and kicked the snow with his feet.

"Yes; but if you knew all about me, p'raps you'd be ashamed of me then," he slowly got out.

"No; I would'n't. You're a very good fellow—that's all I know or want to know," said Tom, with great warmth. "I wish I had you for a brother."

Pete choked and mumbled a little, and then said softly—

"I wish that, too—you're so like me, and I feel as if I could do a lot to help you. But that can't be, 'cause I'm an awful villain."

"A villain!" echoed Tom, husky with emotion. "You're an angel. You're so kind and hearty to what I've seen of late. I think God sent you to save me."

"I don't know about God," very dubiously returned Pete. "I rather think, if you knew what I was after afore I came flop down on you, you'd say 'twas the other chap that sent me;" and he pointed suggestively downwards.

"No; He holds all things in His hands," firmly replied Tom.

"That's funny," said Pete, with a puzzled look. "It sounds like you was a sort o' preachin' cove—a kind of gospel grinder; on'y it comes very nice off you. I sort o' like to hear you at it. But hook on, then, and we'll go. Got any mother, Tom?"

"No," and a choking gulp came with the words. "No; she's dead."

"Ah, that's bad!" sympathisingly rejoined Pete. "Father alive?"

"No; dead—dead, too."

"That's bad too. No friends?"

"Not one that I would stoop to apply to;" and a flashing look told what he meant.

"Ah, you're just like me," responded Pete. "My mother's

dead, and my father too ; but he was an awful bad 'un—he was a prig."

"That's a thief?" exclaimed Tom, with a start.

"Yes ; I knew you'd be ashamed o' me," said Pete, trying to withdraw his arm.

"No, I'm not ;" and Tom stuck firmly to his arm. "I like you more and more for your truthfulness and honesty."

"Ah, yes," vaguely muttered Pete, in a choking way ; "my honesty—ah, yes, my honesty."

"Have I offended you ? I didn't mean to—I didn't really."

"Me ? Oh, no ; not a bit. I was only talkin' to myself, ye know—thinkin', like. I needn't make him a bit the wiser," he added to himself. "It's sort o' pleasant to have some one to like you, and not know you're a prig." Then he added aloud, "I'm going to take ye into Mother Greig's kitchen, to get some grub—something to eat. It's just up this close. You're not afraid ?"

"There's nothing to be afraid of. You are going with me, aren't you ?"

"Yes ; but, p'raps you'll meet a rummy lot. However, you don't need to mind them."

"They'll be lodgers, I suppose?" interposed Tom, simply.

"Yes ; sort o'," responded Pete, a little slowly and dryly.

"I suppose she's a very nice woman, this Mrs Greig ?"

"Very nice." But though the reply was spoken with a peculiar emphasis, it did not seem a very hearty one.

"But she'll be in bed," said Tom, drawing back at the recollection. "You know the night's far on."

"Not a bit of her ; her business is percooliar, and keeps her up half the night," said Pete, with an effort. "But don't you take no notice, or she'll get crusty. Here we are. Now, mind—mum's the word."

They were groping into a deep, dark entry—not unlike a slimy sort of a tunnel—from the far end of which came sounds of drinking and merriment. After an exchange of peculiar signals, the door was opened, and they were admitted. Without a word, Pete led the way straight into the kitchen, where he proceeded at once to satisfy himself as to the contents of two pans by the fire, by lifting the lids and sniffing critically.

"Beautiful ! tripe and taties," he said, with a smack of the lips, whiffing the pan under Tom's nose, and causing him nearly to faint with the delicious odour. "On'y smell it."

But faint and exhausted though he was, Tom was more in-

tent on examining the strange and motley company into which he had been so suddenly cast, than the food which the other was so expertly dishing before him. One sharp-eyed old hag, a few flash girls, and some coarse, low-browed men, were the sole occupants of the kitchen; and they one and all ceased their merriment and noise to stare at the new-comer. Pete, with a rare delicacy, bustled in between Tom and the disagreeable eyes, and addressed him loudly to drown the other voices.

"Now, then, peg away! Take the thin first, it'll kind o' prepare your weak stomach for the rest. Stop, stop! this won't do. Crickey, you'd kill yourself in no time if you wolfed it up like that. See, I'll give ye it in little bits; there now, that's better."

With something very like motherly watchfulness, Pete began to give his new friend a hearty meal, as he had expressed it, all in little bits; but then the surrounding eyes got curious, and remarks began to circulate on the strange likeness between the two youths.

"Never knew you had a brother before," said one of the girls, bouncing forward. "Might give us an introduction."

But Pete seized her by the shoulders and hurled her back, right across the room.

"You keep your own side of the house," he wrathfully remarked; "don't shove in your nose where you're not wanted"

"Ha, ha, ha! how good our Pete's turned all of a sudden," jeeringly laughed the girl.

Pete flushed and choked over the answer, but it came out at last, doggedly and firmly.

"Never you mind; whether I'm good or not, I sha'n't let you near him."

"What? are you going to keep him all to yourself, as an apprentice?"

Pete's brow grew blacker and blacker; but he appeared to curb himself into making a calm reply.

"No; I found him in the snow, dead beat with hunger and cold, and I'm giving him a feed off my supper, that's all—if you will know."

A sudden silence fell on them all after the words. Pete had made an impression on them, in his rough way; but the fact dawned but slowly on themselves.

"Well done, Pete!" "That's right." "Good lad; the open hand seldom wants," burst from the group, lawless though

they were ; and then something like rough sympathy and respect shone from their faces, as they crowded round the stranger.

“Why, Pete ! you’d pass for twins.”

“That’s true, he is like me,” said Pete, with something like a glow of pride ; “on’y,”—and his voice sank a little as he added it,—“on’y, he’s a straight cove.”

Whatever this meant, the reflection seemed to sadden him ; for he shortly after drew Tom out to the passage, slipped two shillings into his hand, and whispered—

“This isn’t a very good place for you to lodge in. I’ll see you to another, if ye like. And keep up your pecker for to-morrow ; nobody ever knows what’ll turn up. But if you don’t get on, or don’t get work, or people won’t have nothing to do wi’ ye, come to me, and you’ll have a bob and a supper at any time.”

Tom threw his arms right round him, and hugged him tight ; but not a word could he get out. Pete was moved—deeply moved—and got very husky in his reply—

“I know what you mean : that you’d lay down your life for me, and all that sort of thing. But, bless ye ! I don’t want ye to lay it down ; I want ye to keep it up, and get strong, and all right and square. P’raps you’ll see me again, and p’raps you won’t. But if you should see me on the street when there’s a peg standin’ near, don’t take no notice of me.”

“Why ?”

“Never mind why. It might do you harm—that’s all. Besides, you know, I’m not the right sort : I don’t know nothing about God, and all them things.”

“Oh, I don’t believe that. Your heart’s all right.”

“Yes ; but my hands ain’t.”

With this expressive reply, and a wring of the hand, they parted, having reached a common lodging-house, where Tom Currie found shelter for the night.

They say that when things are at their worst they are sure to mend ; and it seemed to be true in the case of Tom Currie. The very day after his narrow escape and the strange encounter with Pete, he met, not a friend but an acquaintance, long forgotten, of his mother’s ; and this acquaintance, inquiring with delicacy into his affairs, at last ventured to say that he knew of something that would keep the homeless wanderer from absolute starvation, if he were not too proud to take it. Tom was not too proud, or he had acquired a new interest in life, for he closed with the offer at once, and

the next day saw him installed as a kind of light-porter to a draper on the Bridge. He was fit, by education and culture, for something far better ; but he had the rare good sense not only to accept the ten shillings a-week as a perfect godsend, but to throw all his energies into his new occupation. His employer was delighted with the polite, nimble youth who was always punctual and honest, and got to take such a special interest in him, that he procured him a more comfortable lodging, encouraged him with several gifts, and even spoke of raising his wages. In this way the spring and summer glided on. But in all Tom's trottings over the town he had never once got a glimpse of his strange friend of a night, Peter Crewe. More than once, with a strange yearning after the lad, and a heart bursting with gratitude, he had gone down near the foot of the Canongate to hunt for Mother Greig's kitchen ; but the search was always so fruitless, that he began faintly to wonder whether the events of the memorable night were not all a dream. From this idea he was to have a rude awakening ; and that brings me to my part of the story.

One fine sunny day in June, Tom had been over at the New Town with a number of parcels, and was hurrying back to the shop, when, just as he reached the middle of the North Bridge, an elderly lady suddenly pounced upon him, gripped him fast by the collar with both hands, and screamed out—

“ Help ! help !—thieves !—murder ! murder !—police ! I've got him ! I've got him ! Help ! help ! ”

A crowd instantly gathered, and the old lady soon had a dozen officious hands to help her to hold the astonished Tom ; and this crowd soon attracted a policeman from the corner of the High Street, and myself as well. We had some difficulty in getting in ; but when we did, the old lady instantly recognised me, and poured the whole matter in my ear.

“ Oh, sir, you know me—Mrs Benson. You were at the Office when I gave in the case. You remember it was a gold watch, snatched from me on the street. This is the thief—I recognised him at once. Take him up !—take him away ! ”

He certainly answered the description. I looked at the youth. Balmoral cap, light sack coat, good features, brown eyes, and a faint moustache ; and yet there was something about him that made me hesitate.

“ Are you sure it's he ? ” I asked. “ Mind, there is one very like him.”

"I don't care though there were fifty like him—that's the thief," she emphatically and positively returned; and of course I could do nothing but take him off to the Office there and then.

There, after he had been searched, and nothing of importance found upon him, I began the usual formula—

"What's your name?"

"Thomas Currie."

There was no hang-dog hesitation: his answer came out at once, clear and firm. The same with his address, the nature of his employment, the name of his employer, and so on. I began to be certain there was a mistake.

"Well, what have you got to say to this charge?" I asked, after an awkward pause.

He smiled lightly and fearlessly.

"I am perfectly innocent. I know nothing about it," was his reply.

"Oh, you brazen piece of wickedness!" burst forth Mrs Benson, shaking her clenched hand in his face. "You impudent thief! Can you stand there and tell a lie to my face—me, that saw you do it?" But there I had to stop her.

"You identify this young man as the thief?" I sharply interposed.

"I do."

"Then that will do. Good-day;" and I politely began to bow her out.

But I was interrupted. The door opened, and another man, who had been out on the hunt, appeared, bringing with him Peter Crewe. Now, here comes a most curious and interesting point. The moment the eyes of our first prisoner fell on the young thief, he turned white with sudden emotion, and staggered slightly forward. Such things are so common, that, dolt as I was, I took no notice of it, but placed them side by side for comparison. Then, as I turned to Mrs Benson, a quick whisper caught my ear, and, looking back sharply, I saw Tom whisper something hastily into the ear of the young thief.

"Stop that!" I said. "That's not allowed."

"I know it's not," cried Tom, springing forward, and dropping at my feet with a new light in his eyes. "Oh, sir! I give in; I'm guilty. It was I that stole the watch. I confess it all. Take me away and lock me up."

I was astonished; but my astonishment was nothing to that of Pete, the young pickpocket, at his side. He started right

back, and his eyes first widened like saucers, and then filled with something very like tears.

"Well, I never!" he huskily exclaimed. "Why, you precious good-hearted fool, what are ye about?"

"Confessing it all," cried Tom, with quick eagerness. "You know well enough that you're not the man—don't you, now?—and that you are perfectly innocent, and that you never even saw the watch? You know you're not me?"

"Certingly, I've—I've—some idea o' that kind," stammered Pete, in a puzzled and confused way.

"You see? he admits it!" anxiously and hurriedly continued Tom. "I am the guilty man; I took the watch, and—and—"

"Popped it, p'raps?" interposed Pete, with a curious look.

"Yes, I pawned it. I pawned it immediately after—"

"For two quid, p'raps?" continued Pete, in the same tone.

"Yes, yes—exactly two pounds. You'll find the watch at the pawn shop."

"First popping-stall above New Street, p'raps?" suggested Pete.

"The very place. I've—I've lost the money somewhere; but now you know all. I was tempted to it in some strange way—it came on me all of a sudden, like—and—you'd better lock me up."

"I knew it! I told you so!" cried Mrs Benson, in triumph. "I knew he was the guilty man."

Pete turned round, and impressively laid his finger on her arm. Something in his manner caused a deep silence to fall on us all.

"You know that, do you, ma'am?" he asked. "I mean, you're sort o' cock sure that 'twas him that priggged your watch?"

"Yes; quite sure."

"Then, ma'am, you're a precious big dunderheaded ass!" was the firm and emphatic rejoinder. "No!" and he stretched himself up to his full height, and actually for the moment looked somewhat better than a pickpocket. "I'm bad—I'm an awful villain, I know, and I don't like to get nabbed; but I can't stand this. Just listen: I priggged the watch!"

"Don't listen to him; he'll say anything, just to get me off," eagerly cried the other, interrupting him. "I believe he's not quite right in the mind. You've just come out of a lunatic asylum, haven't you?" he added, anxiously appealing to Pete.

Pete put the cuff of his shabby coat to his eyes, and fairly burst into tears.

"No, I've not," he chokingly got out at last. "And I won't say it either, for all you're egging me on to it. Oh, but you're a regular good sort! Blow me, if I ever thought there was such a kind 'softy' in the world, that would do so much for poor Pete! Just you shut up, and let me go to prison. Do; there's a good fellow!"

"No, I sha'n't," cried Tom, with growing excitement and eagerness. "He wishes to save me, just because—because—I did him a good turn once."

Pete looked up, opened his eyes to their widest, and stared through his tears, perfectly transfixed with astonishment.

"Would any one be good enough to give me a thump on the head? Would any one kick me, to make sure that I'm not asleep? Would any one tell me whether I'm Pete or not; or whether I'm turned into another cove altogether?" he cried, finding his tongue at last. "Well, I'm blessed, if you don't take my breath away! Oh—oh—oh!—you pre-cious 'softy'!" and the cuff of his coat again came into active operation as he blubbered forth the words, "Don't I wish you was my brother!—hang it! I'd turn a straight cove."

Every one in the room, not excepting the accuser herself, was visibly affected. But we were as near a settlement of the difficulty as ever.

"I stole the watch!—I demand to be locked up!" cried Tom, with reckless daring. "She has identified me, and so will the pawnbroker. Bring him before me."

"Ah! that's all 'cause I've changed my togs," said Pete, with a reflective nod of the head. "Never mind, I agree. Bring the pawnbroker; he'll soon tell you which is which."

The suggestion seemed a good one, and was at once acted upon. A man was sent down, and he shortly returned with both the pawnbroker and the stolen watch.

I placed the two youths side by side, and then addressed the wondering pawnbroker.

"This watch has been stolen and pawned in your office by one of these youths," I said. "Look at them well, and then be good enough to point out the one who deposited the watch with you."

The man looked keenly at both, and then, without hesitation, laid his hand on—Tom Currie!

"That's the one that pledged it," he said firmly.

"Why, you great pig-headed rat!" incoherently burst forth the young pickpocket, "look here;" and he snatched at Tom's cap,

and stuck it jauntily on the side of his own head. "Look at me now—fool!"

The man looked, wavered, and hesitated; and then a puzzled smile broke over his face.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I think it was both of them put into one," he simply replied. "For the life of me, I can't say which it was; but I'm sure it was one of them."

"Which do you say?" I sharply inquired of the accuser, Mrs Benson.

"That," she firmly replied, laying her hand on Tom. "I hold to my first opinion. That is the thief."

Tom brightened visibly. Pete, perfectly aghast, dashed the bonnet down on the floor, and stared blankly before him. I turned to Tom.

"You confess to the theft?"

"Certainly."

"And you, Pete, you admit that you also are the thief?" I inquiringly pursued.

"Certingly, that's my opinion. I mean that I prigged it—myself—with nobody else helping me," he answered, in a maze of bewilderment. "But p'raps I'm just noo out of a lunatic asylum. P'raps I am. Mind! I don't remember being in one. My out-and-out opinion is, that I prigged that ticker—solid, firm, mind. But I may be wrong. P'raps I'm not Pete; p'raps I'm somebody else—a sort of straight cove that never did nothing wrong. Hookey, you know—over that way," and he pointed over his left shoulder, and then determinedly planted himself in a seat, and suddenly raised his tone. "I am Pete—I am the prig—and I don't budge from here."

"Very good; there is some mystery about the case," I interposed; "but, in order to get to the bottom of it, I see but one course—that is, to lock you both up."

I said this more as a feeler than anything else; but, to my surprise, they both readily offered themselves, and were accordingly taken away and locked up in separate cells.

I was now thoroughly roused and interested, and for some days did my best to hunt up all sorts of information concerning the two prisoners; but nothing that I could get at gave me any solution to the mystery, but rather the reverse. The more I inquired, the more was I puzzled. I found that one was thoroughly honest and trustworthy, and had never been known to steal or keep company with thieves; while the character of the other was already so well known to us, that inquiry was

considered almost superfluous. More : I determinedly hunted out and made sure that no blood relation existed between the two bearing such a marvellous resemblance to each other; and then I cudgelled my brains in vain for a probable cause for their being so closely linked in affection and devotion.

The day of the trial came ; and then the only course we could follow was to place them at the bar together, and charge both with the crime. But here another difficulty arose. When they were called upon to plead, they each expressed their willingness to plead guilty, provided the other were removed. That, of course, was inadmissible ; and a plea of not guilty was recorded, that the case might go to proof. The evidence already recorded was brought forward, conflicting and puzzling though it was, for the simple reason that we had no other to offer ; and then witnesses were heard for the prisoners, by which a pretty fair case of *alibi* was made out for both the accused. It was a jury trial of course, being in the Sheriff Court ; but they never thought of retiring. A mere glance round the box, and they gave their verdict—"Not Proven."

I had expected it all along ; and as the two youths left the bar, and walked out of court linked to each other, I followed them with eager eyes. At that moment I would have given anything to have proved their secret. But, not long after, the secret came to me unbidden. A gentleman in the habit of assisting deserving criminals, and of referring to me for information and advice, called upon me and mentioned the names of Thomas Currie and Peter Crewe. They had been recommended to him ; they wished to get out to America together ; did I think them deserving subjects ? I thought for a moment.

"Send them out to me, and I will soon let you know," I said at last.

He did send them, and then I drew out of them the facts I have narrated, with the additional agreeable news that Pete was now immovably fixed on being "a straight cove," and in the new country was intending to change his name to Peter Currie. I was only too happy to give them a recommendation. They are now settled as brothers, near Lake Ontario, in a town called Dumbarton ; and the very first letter I received from them contained a remittance of two pounds, to be handed to the pawnbroker who had been deprived of the stolen watch.

A POACHER'S GRUDGE.

ONE afternoon in August, a message came in from the town of D——, and was placed in my hand as soon as I got back from dinner. It ran thus :—

“ Police Station, D——, 1 P.M.

“ A gentleman to-day has been accidentally shot by the discharge of his own fowling-piece. The wounded man formed one of a shooting party on the C—— estate. By some means he had got separated from the others, and was found nearly dead in one of the plantations. He is not expected to recover, and is far too low to be questioned ; but already some nasty reports are afloat as to the cause of the accident. The shot appears to have entered his side *from behind* ; and the reports to which I allude are to the effect that the affair is no accident, but connected in some strange way with a Captain Grosvenor, who formed one of the party. The best way to crush the silly stories would be to instantly send out a detective to investigate.

“WALTER DAVIES, Superintendent.”

Without comment of any kind, and taking the note in my hand, I hurried down to the railway station, caught a train, and was soon birked over the six miles. Davies, the superintendent, had awaited me at the station ; and, together, we started for the scene of the accident—a secluded spot about a mile out of the town. On the way I tackled him for information.

“ Reports have generally a foundation, though often a slight one ; and they have always a beginning,” I said. “ How did this one come to you at first ? ”

“ I don't know. The policeman, who happened to be passing near the place, and first brought word of the accident, had heard some one say, that if the thing were properly looked into, it would be found to be no accident.”

I know now that my next question should have been, Who was this “ some one ? ” If I had only thought of it, I would have saved myself a deal of trouble ; but I didn't. It is wonderful how simple a thing seems to look back on, and how stupid our gropings appear, when we are fairly out in the full blaze of light !

“ And why is this Captain Grosvenor's name mentioned in connection with the affair ? ”

"I suppose because he and Mr Louden, the wounded gentleman, are known to be the reverse of friendly. Mr Cairns, of C——, was aware of the existing feud between the two ; but as he was on intimate terms with both, and the grounds of Captain Grosvenor adjoined his own, when the party was made up he could not invite one without giving offence to the other ; so he invited both. By some evil chance both came. Of course no words or salutations were exchanged ; and as the party proceeded over the ground, the two got away from each other on the earliest opportunity. From that time until after the discovery of the accident, according to the distinct statement of the Captain, they never met or saw each other."

"When did the Captain make this statement?"

"Not an hour ago, when I saw him in the street, and thought proper to tell him of the silly report that had begun to circulate."

"You saw him in the street? Did you stop him, or he you?"

"I don't exactly know—we just met each other. I rather think he stopped me, for at first I was not sure whether I should mention the thing to him, and was almost passing on with simply a bow."

"Did you say you had sent for a detective?"

"No."

"You did well. Did he seem anxious to avoid the subject?"

"No ; quite the reverse. He began about it himself."

"Ah, indeed !"

I trod a piece of the dusty road in silence, thinking how I would put the next question. A great deal depended on it, and with some men I would have plumped it out at once. But the man beside me, though a first-rate policeman, and the very man for his place, would not have made much of a detective ; hence my caution. At last I settled it, and asked—

"Did you ask the Captain if he had seen Mr Louden after parting, or did he volunteer the statement?"

"I did not ask him ; I wouldn't have done so for the world. It would have looked prying and suspicious. I did not even lead him to it. He said it spontaneously, and repeated it twice after. 'Mr Davies,' he said, 'never mind the silly stories ; for after we entered cover Mr Louden and myself never met, or as much as saw each other.'"

One more question I put.

"This Captain Grosvenor, is he well liked, or is he a man likely to have enemies?"

"I don't know that he is particularly well liked. He is a plain country gentleman—a little harsh and stern to those under him, perhaps, but otherwise right enough."

"The place where the thing happened—is it far from here?"

"Oh, no! quite close at hand. 'Fordie's Gowl,' they call it. It's not far from the C—— House."

"Can we get to it quietly, without going near the house, or causing unnecessary stir?"

"I intend that. We are past the house a good way now. I will take you through a gap in the hedge, and across two fields, into the grounds. No one will see us, except, perhaps, the gamekeeper, and I know him."

A turn in the road brought us to the end of the long green lane, down which my companion glanced, and then started back with a slight imprecation.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"We can't get in unseen; there's a man sitting at the side, opposite the gap."

"Who is he?—the Captain?"

"No. Oh! I daresay it's all right; he'll never suspect anything!"

"But who is he?"

"Only a sturdy rascal, who knows me pretty well—Mackinlay, they call him—a kind of half-poacher, half-pitman; that is, he works three days in the week, and poaches the other four."

"Well, just pass him and go in, as if nothing particular were the matter. I daresay he has got in by the same road himself before now."

"Ay, many a thousand times."

By this time we were close upon the subject of our talk. He was a rough-looking fellow, and returned my stare of curiosity with full interest. Still I suspected nothing till we were both through the hedge, and then, happening to glance back, an unmistakable brightening of the man's eyes—half exultant, half malignant—caught my attention, and set my thoughts a floundering.

It was a simple circumstance—the man sitting on the bank of the opposite hedge, watching us go through the gap, and perhaps even guessing our destination and the nature of our errand; but why should an evil-looking grin, almost triumphant in its flash,

distort his heavy countenance the moment our backs were turned?

I am considered both good and quick at reading faces, and to me the man's appeared to say, "Ah, ha! they are roused, then, and some one is in for it now!" The man had an interest in the affair; after revolving the matter in my mind, I laid that down as a settled thing. What was his interest? There I was pulled up. Could it be spite, or an old grudge against the suspected man? And had he, then, been really waiting and watching there for us! These odd questions at last suggested a query to my companion.

"You said that the grounds of Captain Grosvenor were close to these. Is the Captain very stringent in carrying out the laws against poachers?"

Davies stopped, turned right round, and smiled out in my face.

"How did you guess it?" he cried, in astonishment. "He is strict; I should say there's not a man in the Lothians more so. A poacher taken on his grounds need expect no mercy."

"Ah! poaching is pretty common about here, I've heard. Has the Captain obtained many convictions in his time?" I simply pursued.

"No, not many. Very few of them, you see, would venture on his grounds: they're afraid. He has a good deal of influence, and takes them the full length that the law will allow, besides annoying them in a number of ways that you townspeople know nothing about."

"Ah, indeed! You've a pretty good memory. I think. Can you remember the names of any of the poachers whom he has convicted? If they are few, you will recall them the more easily."

"Oh, yes! there was Wilkie, about six months ago, and Mackinlay, for pheasants—"

"Mackinlay! Isn't that the man we saw just now?"

"The same rascal; and there was—"

"Ah! never mind about the others just now. I suppose there's not much love lost between Mackinlay and the Captain?"

"Love! I should say not! There's hate, and plenty of it. I wish you had seen them at the trial. After the Captain had given his evidence, Mackinlay got in a rage, said the Captain had sworn a lie, and hurled an inkstand at his head. It was a near miss, and Mackinlay got six months, without the option of a fine."

"That wouldn't improve his temper."

"No; and to make matters worse, Mackinlay's little girl died while he was in prison. I believe he loved that child, coarse and rough though he appears; and, somehow, it got into his head that she died of starvation—and, of course, through him being in prison, and not there to work for her. If anything comes out against the Captain, there will not be a happier man treading the earth than Mackinlay."

I had begun to believe this last statement myself. I thought it the soundest thing my companion had uttered. I had now accounted, in a way that at least satisfied myself, for Mackinlay's interest in us and our destination. But was there not more in it? Did Mackinlay not know something of the "accident," and how it happened? I laid the question by for future solution, and meantime, as we had arrived at "Fordie's Gowl," turned my thoughts to other matters.

"Fordie's Gowl" was a long narrow hollow, covered nearly knee-deep with tangled furze, and having a natural ridge at either side, thickly covered with trees and underwood. The passage being narrow, and the trees meeting overhead, the sunshine and light only got in in straggling gleams, and that, with the loneliness of the spot, gave the place a kind of chill sombreness to my eyes. Think as I liked, I could not get rid of the idea that it was just the sort of place for a murder. "How easy it would be," I thought, glancing along the thicket, "for a man to conceal himself there and fire down on any one passing along here, without once being seen himself."

We found the spot where the accident had occurred easily enough. The long grass and furze were trampled down and crushed, as if by the body of a man, and a streak of sunlight coming in on the place showed crimson splashes on the green blades. Turning these aside, and staining my hands as I did so, I found a round pool or patch of blood, which had gushed out at one place, and then congealed before it could sink into the ground.

I looked for foot marks, and found a good many about the spot—crossed and indistinct, and finally one pair, heavily indented, leading along the hollow and across one of the ridges.

"Where does that lead to?" I asked of my companion, who had followed me in silence. "Is the house in that direction?"

"No, only one of the gamekeeper's. The wounded man was taken there first, I believe. It was the gamekeeper who found him, and carried him there."

"Ah, I see! Let's go back and have a look at the sides."

We did go back; and then, after a careful examination of the thicket at the west side of the hollow, I distinctly made out the print of a neat, light foot. Close to this, and dangling from the sharp point of a broken branch, I found a shred of cloth—light tweed—such as is used for gentlemen's shooting jackets. I showed it to my companion.

"What colour was the coat of the wounded man, do you know?" I asked.

"It was dark, I think: not like that."

"And the Captain's?"

"It was light: very like that. Hang me! but I could swear that's a bit of the same cloth!" and his hands came together with a sudden smack as he got the words out.

I was a little excited myself, but I concealed it as well as possible.

"You didn't notice whether his coat was torn when you met him?" was my next question.

"I didn't. Of course, I never thought of looking for such a thing. Besides, that little shred wouldn't make such a tear, even if it were from his coat—at least not to show much."

"That's true. I suppose we need scarcely look the other side, except for form's sake. Some one has been here, evidently; but—ha! what's that?"

My companion's foot had touched something, and it ran down the ridge before us into the furze. At first I thought it was a mole, or some living thing; but after stooping down and searching about, I found that it was simply a round, flat box of percussion caps. Some minute writing on the white part of the label bearing the maker's name caught my eye, and I let out a quick exclamation as I read, "Captain Grosvenor—The best 3 doz. box;" but I said nothing. I merely noticed that the name of the seller—an ironmonger, High Street, D——, was also stuck on the box, in the shape of a small label, and then I consigned it to a safe pocket, in company with the shred of light tweed.

"These things may be useful," I said. "Now let's have a look at the other side before we pay a visit to the game-keeper."

We crossed over, avoiding the bloody grass, and very soon I discovered other footmarks. The ground was softer and barer at that side, and at one spot, close to a tree, the impression of one heavy foot was so clear and distinct that I noted

down a short description of it on the spot. It was the imprint of a right foot, encased in a heavy tacketed boot. In the heel three of the tackets were wanting. The mark was directly behind a low sweeping branch of the tree, and seemed to me to have been formed by the owner placing one knee on the branch and leaving the right foot on the ground, while he leant forward to peer out into the "Gowl" before. I sat down on the low branch, stared at the footprint, and vainly wished for the skill of an Indian to make it "speak." But, puzzle myself as I liked, it remained dumb. It did seem to me that at least two persons, other than the wounded man and the gamekeeper who found him, had that day been on the spot; but what connection they had with the affair, if they had any, I could not yet determine. Captain Grosvenor had been there—I made sure of that, for the box was bone dry, and it had rained the day before; but that proved nothing, for he might have wandered in that direction and dropped it, and even torn his coat into the bargain, before the accident. I began to wish I could discover the owner of the heavy boot wanting the three tackets in the heel: he might have seen something. Captain Grosvenor had not yet denied being in "Fordie's Gowl." Whether he would do so, of course, I intended very cautiously to try. It may seem strange to some that I did not—as the man had had a good share in my thoughts and inquiries—at this juncture plump on Mackinlay as the owner of the tackety boot, even as a sort of random guess. To this I can only say that it seems strange to me too; but it is a fact. That idea came later.

We left the "Gowl," and I followed my companion for about five minutes through the wood, and then we emerged directly in front of the gamekeeper's cottage, which we entered without ceremony. The man was at home, dozing in an arm-chair; but he rose at once upon our entrance, and hastily placed seats for us. But we did not sit down just at once. Davies took me to a corner of the room, lifted up a light fowling-piece, slightly dabbled with blood, and placed it in my hand.

"That's the gun," he said—"Mr Louden's. It was found pointing at his side, with the trigger caught in the furze behind."

The gamekeeper looked on with interest while I examined it. By chance I pulled back the trigger, and the exploded cap fell on the floor at our feet. The gamekeeper picked it up, and was about to hand it to me, when some peculiarity about it seemed to catch his eye, and induced a long, close scrutiny.

"That's queer," he said at last.

"What is?" we both cried in a breath.

"This is not one of the caps Mr Louden used."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I myself supplied him this morning. I can prove it too. It's a different kind, a different size, and a different maker. See; it shuffles on the nipple, and the trigger has never 'gone down' on it at all; in fact, I don't see how it could have fired. But! look—here is Mr Louden's shooting-belt just as it was left, and here are his caps: compare them for yourself."

I examined them with a shaking hand. The difference was apparent at a glance, even to my unpractised eyes. A thought—a quick suspicion—and I pulled out the box I had found. The exploded cap, and the bright ones in Captain Grosvenor's box, in shape, size, and appearance, were identical.

"You say you don't see how it could have fired?" I continued, with growing excitement and interest. "Are you sure it has been fired?"

The gamekeeper unlocked the barrel and looked through it. It was empty, and some would at once have concluded that it had been fired off. Not so the experienced man at our side. He smelt the barrel, tasted it by putting in his tongue, and finally shoved in his little finger, and brought it out covered with minute grains of unexploded powder. He staggered, while a ghastly horrified look overspread his face at the discovery, and the gun almost dropped from his hands.

"The gun," he gasped—"the gun has never been fired at all. The charge has only been drawn!"

"And yet Mr Louden was lying shot. Ah! now we're getting at it!" I cried. "Some one fired on him, drew the charge from his gun, put an exploded cap on the nipple, and then left him to bleed to death after placing the gun in position. That is my theory. Now, you discovered the accident—perhaps you were near the spot all morning. Did you see any one going in the direction of 'Fordie's Gowl,' or coming from it, before or after the accident?"

"Yes. A few minutes before I found Mr Louden, I saw Captain Grosvenor coming from that airt. He didn't see me. He was going fast towards the house."

"Ah! Any one else?"

"No one else till I was near home—carrying Mr Louden—when Jack Mackinlay came out and offered to help me."

"That's the poacher?"

"Yes ; but he never poaches on these grounds, and he's very useful in trapping vermin ; so Mr Cairns lets him come and go when he likes."

"Did he seem surprised or horrified at the accident ?"

"No, I can't say he did. I didn't think of that at the time ; but it was a little strange."

I didn't think so now ; I thought it the most natural thing in the world.

"Ah ! we'll now go and see Mr Jack Mackinlay," I said ; "I'm beginning to have an interest in the man."

After a few injunctions and directions, we left the game-keeper's, and had a pleasant walk of ten minutes to the pitmen's cottages. I say "pleasant," in a kind of speculative way, because it was a pleasant time of the year, and everything about us was green and bright ; but I saw none of it. Nay, more : if I were taken over the same road to-day, I could not recognise it. I was completely shut up with my own thoughts ; and when I woke up, we were in Mackinlay's well-sanded kitchen. The owner was seated by the fire with his boots off, staring with knitted brows into the fading embers, and for a moment he did not notice us. The heavy muddy boots, propped against the fender, caught my eye, and without a word I stooped and lifted that of the right foot. Then Mackinlay looked up without a frown or a smile, and stared coolly at me while I measured the width and length of the sole and heel with three twigs from my pocket. They tallied exactly, and then I pointed out to my companion that three tacks in the heel were wanting. I began to think I would take Mackinlay with me, provided he would not speak. But he did speak, and to the point, too.

"Well, are you done, Mr M'Govan ?" quietly asked the poacher, in a slightly sarcastic tone, as I laid down the boot.

I smiled after the first start.

"You know me, then ?" I said.

"Yes, I've seen you before. I saw you going towards 'Fordie's Gowl,' for instance, not an hour ago."

"True. Well—no, I'm not quite done yet," I said, taking a seat and drawing it close to his own. "You will answer a few questions first ?"

"A hundred if you like."

"Less will do ; but mind, you may have to swear to the truth of the answers yet ; so be cautious."

He nodded, as if fully aware of the position, and I proceeded to take down his answers in writing.

"You were in 'Fordie's Gowl' yourself to-day?"

"I was."

"Did you see the accident to Mr Louden!"

"I saw Mr Louden *shot!*" was the emphatic reply.

"Shot! Very good. Why did you not at once give the alarm?"

A blaze of wrath, evidently long pent up, kindled in the man's face at the question, and his great fists were clenched into knotted lumps as he swung his chair right round to face me.

"Why did I not give the alarm?" he fiercely got out between his teeth. "Why did I not build a gallows for myself? Because it might have cost me my life; because in this country, there's one law for the rich, and another for the poor; because I got six months in prison for telling the truth and calling that man a liar before! I'm not an ass; don't think it!"

I had evidently touched a sore spot, for the man was fearfully excited, and I could see the foam working out at the corners of his mouth.

"What did you see?" I said at last, in a subdued tone. "Don't be afraid to let it out; I hardly think it will injure you this time."

"It won't. I've made sure of that. What did I see? I saw Mr Louden passing along the 'Gowl.' Captain Grosvenor came out from among the trees almost immediately after, and started back on seeing the other. The next minute bang went his gun, and Mr Louden tumbled down in a heap, shot through the side. The Captain looked white and flurried at what he had done, and ran down, looking on every side, and hung over Louden for a moment. Then he turned away; but he came back, lifted up Louden's gun, drew the charge, put the cap off his own on the nipple, and then fastened it down among the furze. It was all done very quick. He put the drawn charge in the left outside pocket of his shooting coat, and then ran off over the ridge. When he was gone, I was just going to run down and see if the man was dead, when the gamekeeper came along, lifted him up, and bolted. I cut across and got up to him at last, but he wouldn't let me touch the wounded man."

"Of course, you are quite sure—I mean, you can swear that, to the best of your belief, Captain Grosvenor fired the gun deliberately and intentionally?"

There was a pause—a slight one, it is true; but still a pause—and then, in a kind of fierce, reckless burst, he got out—

"Do you wish me to go with you?" he faintly asked, after a pause.

"If you please—yes."

"But you don't want to handcuff me or walk me through the streets, do you?"

"No, that is not necessary, unless you struggle or attempt to escape. You will have to go to Edinburgh. Would you prefer a cab to the railway?"

"My own carriage, if you please. Perhaps you would be good enough to let me order it, and then not mention the nature of your visit to any of the servants. I will see my own lawyer, and arrange for bail after we get in."

"Yes, after to-morrow, if it is accepted."

No more was said. The carriage was soon ready, and he was quietly driven into Edinburgh and locked up, after distinctly repeating the statement, that he had never once been in "Fordie's Gowl" that day. Next day a full and minute deposition was taken down from Mackinlay's lips, and duly sworn to, and from which it appeared that nothing less than a deliberate murder had at least been attempted. As soon as the Captain got scent of the evidence to be used against him, he changed his story, and made a full confession, which tallied exactly with Mackinlay's account in all but the intentional firing of the gun. This he firmly persisted and solemnly swore was purely an accident, caused by his starting back, and the stock striking a tree and causing the trigger to fall. A sudden fear of the consequences, and the suspicious look of the circumstances, caused him to attempt to make it appear an accident from Mr Loudon's own gun.

Thus matters stood—a liar on one side, and a poacher, determinedly swearing, and breathing revenge and hate, on the other; but nothing could be done in the way of a trial till Mr Loudon took a turn for better or for worse. After hanging on the brink of death for nearly a month, this gentleman slowly began to recover. As soon as he was able to speak, he was questioned as to the accident, and then, to our chagrin, we found that he knew exactly as much as ourselves—nay, not so much; for of the accident and how it occurred he had not the faintest recollection.

Now, it is easy to see that if nothing had happened, earthly power would have gone hard against the liar in our custody. But at this juncture—at least shortly after, when the Captain had "run his letters"—a higher Power took the matter in

hand, and settled it in a way unexpected by all. An accident happened to Mackinlay in the pit : a mass of coal fell across his breast, nearly flattening his ribs and lungs, and he was taken out nearly dead. The day after, I got this telegram from Davies, the superintendent :—

“Police Station, D—, 11 A.M.

“Mackinlay’s wife has been here. He is dying, and appears to have something on his mind. She thinks it is in connection with his evidence against Captain Grosvenor. Perhaps you would see him?”

I did see him ; but at first he was furious at my questions, and in faint gasps swore roundly at his wife for conveying such a message to us. I said no more on the subject, but began quietly to converse about other things.

The photograph of a little girl with long sunny curls lay on the little table at his bedside. I took it up, and began to talk of my own little girl, then in heaven, and only taken from me a few months before. He drank in every word with the greatest eagerness, joining in occasionally with a sob or a whisper till he was thoroughly melted.

“Ah ! sir,” he cried, grasping my hand, with the tears flowing from his eyes, “I almost think I must have known you long ago ; you’re the only one who ever seemed to understand me. They say you’re a detective, but I’d rather hear you speak than a minister. I’ll say that, though there isn’t an ounce of life in me now. If you like, I’ll give you that portrait, sir ; and perhaps, when you look at it, you’ll think of poor Jack Mackinlay, who had a wee lassie, and loved her, and had feelings just as well as the richest in the land. But I can’t go and meet her this way ; she’d be ashamed of her father there if I did. I have sin on my mind, and I’ll get it off ; and maybe God will forgive me after all.”

What followed I need not relate. Suffice it to say, that his dying deposition or confession effectually cleared Captain Grosvenor from any intention to shoot ; and the same day that I attended Mackinlay’s funeral, that gentleman was set at liberty, though whether the narrow escape was a lesson to him or not, I have never had an opportunity to learn. The little portrait—Mackinlay’s dying gift, fading a little, but still legible—is now propped up on the desk before me, and the little face seems to smile on me as I write.

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TRAPPED AT LAST.

MOST people agree that revenge is the worst of passions. Yet every form of it is not bad. There is such a thing as a wholesome revenge. I don't give that as a new idea—only as one I have not seen noticed before. For instance, Jim Maclusky had never injured me in any way, but he had committed wrongs and crimes which for years I longed and thirsted to see avenged. I used to dream about trapping him. I have spent weeks of thought in scheming to get at him, and studying how others had failed; and I never saw his handsome face and mocking smile flit past me in the street, but my mind ran away back to the stooping form, panting chest, and sunken white face of M'Dermott, the man he had killed. In my dreams I sometimes fancied myself a boy again, standing in the Meadow Walk by the side of the dying detective, and saying, "I wish—oh, I wish!"

And the villain hated me—instinctively, cordially hated me. I believe there was even a certain spice of dread mingled with the feeling. It was long ere I could account for the fact. I felt certain that he knew nothing of my earlier encounter with him, nor of my acquaintance with his victim, M'Dermott. More: I never to my knowledge, even when closeted with my chums, uttered a threat against his safety. When others were blustering and cursing, I remained silent. I had annoyed him occasionally in the ordinary execution of my duty, that was all. Though a double-dyed, sordid scoundrel, without a spark of romance to lighten his character, he was thoroughly intelligent, and felt that I had marked him. And of his ultimate fate I had not a moment's doubt. It was only a question of time; for crime, even when coupled with great talent, cunning, and unscrupulous activity, is sure to be a losing game in the long run. Some men ingeniously elude and escape a thousand dangers, only after all to meet with their death by inadvertently scratching themselves on a rusty nail, or stumbling on a pebble; and it was pretty nearly so with

Jim Maclusky. A bundle of note-paper did him; and I daresay less has before now done as great a villain. When I say note-paper, I don't mean that writing material which can be procured at three sheets for a halfpenny, with an envelope in, but those small oblong squares of paper, made separately and properly water-marked, which are used for bank-notes.

On a certain day in a certain year, a bundle containing some hundreds of these blank squares of paper, made for an Edinburgh bank, went amissing from the paper factory. As nearly everybody knows, the making of the bank-note paper is only intrusted to the most influential firms, of long standing and undoubted respectability, and even then the process is conducted with locked doors, and under the strictest surveillance. When a bundle, therefore, went amissing, leaving not the slightest clue to the thief, the greatest alarm prevailed, and we were sent for at once. It was not the value of the paper, nor even the number of notes that could be made from it, though that was no trifle, that caused the alarm, but the fact that where one parcel went amissing, another and another might follow. By means of their invisible agent, the intending forgers might keep up a regular supply.

We investigated, searched, and examined to the best of our ability, but the purloiners of the paper were never discovered. If an arrangement had been made for a regular supply, it was never carried out, for the same thing, as far as I am aware, has never occurred since. But though unable to lay hands on the thief, we continued sharply on the look-out for bogus notes; and after a few weeks our anticipations were realised.

The first news of them hailed from Dalkeith. Two noted "smashers"—that is, passers of counterfeit coin—with a new rig out, which gave them the appearance of a well-to-do country couple, made a descent on the little town, and swindled the unsuspecting shopkeepers here, there, and everywhere. Elated with success, and rather too anxious to make a good haul while they were at it, they made just one purchase too many, and were taken and brought in to Edinburgh next day.

Now, though we found it utterly useless to attempt to extract any information from our two prisoners, after the paper on which the forged notes were printed had been examined and indentified as that stolen from the factory, several circumstances came out which directed our attention to Jim Maclusky as the prime mover in the whole concern. In the first place, the two smashers belonged to his gang; then they were disguised and

made up with a cleverness and skill which we knew could never have emanated from their own dull brains ; then it was known that at a certain hour they had both gone up from Dalkeith to the Eskbank Station, and there had a short interview with a man passing onwards in one of the trains, at which hour it was well-known to us that Jim Maclusky was proceeding to Peebles, to visit an old pal, and thence to Kelso to see the races ; and, lastly, we knew that Maclusky had been bred an engraver, and had more than once before used his skill in the same way. Another, but not so conclusive a circumstance seemed to point at him. He was known to be excessively lazy at anything like manual labour ; and on examining the forged notes, we discovered that the space which is usually covered with the words "ONE POUND," minutely printed, was merely filled up with dotting. But while all these little evidences were being collected, a curious incident came in my way which involved the ruin of another of Maclusky's "cat-paws," and ultimately set us full on his track.

I was going down Leith Walk one forenoon, when I saw a respectable-looking gentleman stagger suddenly on the pavement some distance before me, and then grasp at the lamp-post for support. I was at his side and supporting him in a moment, and then saw by his ghastly paleness that he was really ill. I had seen cases of the same falling sickness before, and, afraid that he would relapse into complete insensibility, I hastily asked his address.

"Thanks," he gasped. "The — Hotel, Princes Street. A cab, if you please."

I hailed a passing cab, assisted him into it, and was about to leave, when he urgently invited me to accompany him. I did so, and was glad to observe an improvement in his appearance as we proceeded ; and when we reached the hotel, he was so far recovered as to be able to stand alone. He paid the cabman out of a one-pound note which he had folded in his pocket-book, along with three or four more ; but when the man was fumbling for the change, a peculiarity about the note in his hand caught my eye. I took it in my hand, and one glance was enough. I turned to the gentleman.

"This is a forged note. Where did you get it ? I demand to know !" for I had recognised one of Jim Maclusky's bogus notes.

"Forged ! Impossible ! he returned, with a look of astonishment and dismay that could not very well have been simulated.

"I got it in change for a five-pound note from an intimate friend of my own, a most respectable spirit-merchant, in the High Street. Well, no, not exactly from him, but from one of his business acquaintances, a merchant of some kind, who happened to be in the shop at the time."

"I am afraid you will have to come with me," I said, dryly, not quite prepared to believe his story. "This matter is becoming serious."

"Most willingly," he responded, with great alacrity. "I am only too anxious to have the matter investigated. Perhaps you will tell me if these likewise are forged?"

I glanced at four more which he placed in my hand. They were from the same plate, bore the same water-mark, and were undoubtedly made from part of the stolen bundle.

"Are these all you have in your possession?" I inquired, placing the five carefully in my own pocket-book.

"All," and he at once placed his pocket-book in my hand for inspection. "To tell the truth, it is on that account I would like the matter investigated at once. It is nearly all the money I have with me, and to wait for a remittance will put me to great inconvenience."

"The name of your friend, the spirit-merchant?"

"Mr Johnstone."

"Johnstone? Is that just below John Knox's Corner?"

"Yes."

"Then he is a respectable man. But who was the other?"

"I have forgotten his name, and I never thought of asking him to endorse the notes. But Mr Johnstone knows him well."

"Very good; we will go there at once."

We did go, and very quickly, in the same cab that had taken us to the hotel.

"Well, Bob, this is an awkward business," I said, familiarly, addressing Mr Johnstone as we entered the shop.

"Awkward business, Jamie! What dae ye mean?"

"The notes you got in exchange for this gentleman's fiver were forged."

"Forged! Toots, man! ye maun hae a bee in your bonnet. I looked at the hale five, and the water-mark was a' richt on them a'."

"Ah! I did not say the paper was forged—only the notes."

He stared, and stared, till the jovial expression on his face gradually changed to one of alarm.

"Man, ye canna mean that," he said at last. "If ye dae, I'm dune mysel', for I chinged twa o' them."

"Let's have a look at them."

He drew out his till, and produced other two bogus notes from the same plate.

"Regularly diddled!" I laughingly cried, as I consigned them to the same receptacle with the other five. "I thought you would have known better. Who changed them?"

"The same man—Tam Inglis, the hand-me-doon man. But he's very likely been dune the same way."

"Tam Inglis! Ho, ho!" and I whistled right out.

"Ay, Tam Inglis! He's richt enough; he's an honest man, isn't he?"

"Fishy."

"I never saw anything fishy about him."

"Very likely; but there are some in existence who can see a few inches further than you, Bob."

"Ye think that because ye fund twa stolen coats in his shop no worth tippence."

"Now, there you are wrong. I think it because—well, no matter why I think it. Perhaps he's all right. If he is, he can prove it. But don't get hot about it; I don't suspect you."

"I'm no sure about that; ye're fit for onything," he returned, smiling out good-humouredly; "but ye're mair like a fief yersel' than I am. I wonder ye never got taen up by mistak'. Stop, man, will ye no hae a nip afore ye gang?"

"Thank you, not just now; I'm in a hurry."

"To dive intae a mare's nest. Awa' wi' ye, then! but if ye dinna bring me back siller for thae twa notes I'll tak' ye're heid aff."

I dismissed the cab, and we turned down into St Mary's Wynd, and soon reached the shop of "T. Inglis, dealer in second-hand clothes."

I picked up the policeman of the beat on the way, and the three of us entered the shop together. Inglis, who knew me well, paled visibly at the sight of us. I was not slow to follow up the advantage.

"Well, Tom, you've done it now," I coolly remarked.

"Wha—what do you mean?" he got out, with a frightfully bad attempt at appearing innocent and unconcerned.

I held up the five notes he had given to the gentleman at my side, and the two I had just received from the publican. He staggered a little, but seemed inclined to keep up a bold front.

"Where's the rest?" I said, sharply, cutting him short.

"I haven't another—not one. I got those for some clothes; and if there's anything wrong with them, I'm not to blame."

"Bah! You can tell me all that after. Bring me the rest of them."

He paused, and looked so queer, that I thought he was going to cry. At last he said—

"There's some notes in my box in the back-shop, and if they're bad it's without me knowing of it."

"Ah! I thought we should get you to speak at last. Show me your box. When did he bring them?"

"He! Who?"

"Don't try it. You know I mean Jim Maclusky. He was here on Saturday."

"Was he? Then I must have been out at the time."

"No, you weren't; for I saw you speaking to him. These lies will all tell against you; it'll be ten years at least."

The words appeared to stab him through. He sank into a seat, and slowly wiped the clammy sweat from his brow.

"Ten years!" he faintly got out. "For what?"

"Attempting to circulate these notes, well knowing them to be forged."

I searched the till, got some money and another forged note, and then opened his box with the key he pointed out. I got other six, which made fourteen in all that I now had in my possession.

"I suppose there were fifteen altogether?" I said, addressing the abject-looking wretch. "You've palmed the other on some one else. We'll soon hear of it. How much did you give him for the lot?"

"I didn't get them from him—"

"I daresay not. He has more cunning in his brain box than a hundred such as you. He didn't appear in the transaction, of course; but some one else did. Who was it?"

He saw he made a slip, and reiterated his story about getting them in the way of business for some clothes. But he changed his story when we got him to the Office. We had just arranged with good security for the appearance of the gentleman who had been done out of the five pounds, when Inglis sent for me to make the following confession:—

"Maclusky, who had had a good many dealings with him in second-hand clothes—probably to be used as disguises—had urgently invited him, on the Saturday I saw him in the shop,

up to one of his haunts, saying, with his usual caution, that he might meet in with some customers whom he might make something of. This mysterious invitation was coupled with sundry hints as to an easy way of making a fortune. This touched Inglis in a vital part, for he was notoriously greedy for money. He went at the time stated, and was taken through the noisy turmoil to a quiet little room, where he made the acquaintance of a little bony, red-whiskered man, who by degrees laid before him the scheme for passing the forged notes. This man assured him that not only were the notes printed on the real paper, but that they were such a faithful copy of the original, that even the bank tellers passed them without the slightest suspicion ; and, moreover, that a snug retreat had been arranged and fitted up, where they could print off thousands more without the slightest possibility of discovery, as soon as the present batch were disposed of. This retreat, he admitted, was not a hundred miles from the spot where they were at that moment seated."

Such a wild thrill of joy ran through me at this last and long-coveted piece of information, that for some moments I could scarcely speak. We had long suspected the existence of such a place, and in that very house, but the most rigorous search had failed to reveal it. Both plunder and criminals who were "wanted," and safe for conviction if caught, though traced to this house, had repeatedly and mysteriously evaporated. Then the inmates, often with Maclusky at their head, had invariably tumbled out beds, shifted boxes, and opened presses, with the most daring freedom and alacrity when we visited the place, grinning all the while in our faces at our futile attempts to discover the hiding-place.

A few words, inadvertently dropped by one of Maclusky's gang months before, now for the first time became intelligible to me ; and I now understood that the retreat could not be entered at a moment's notice, and was only opened up on certain occasions, or great emergencies. More : we knew that in the course of a year as much drink, for illicit sale, was taken into that house as would have floated a small ship ; and, though taken in large quantities, it also became invisible, for we had never been able to make anything but a trifling seizure. From another source we had also learned, that on the Friday following a fresh supply was expected. This was a bare fact, giving us no inkling as to the means to be employed ; but still it was a fact.

Putting all these things together, here was the conclusion we arrived at. The snug retreat would be opened on the Friday to admit the liquor, and it could not be quickly closed ; therefore, if we could on that night by any means get smuggled into the house without scaring the shy game we were so eager to bag, we might not only unravel the mystery of years, but make a rich haul in the shape of seizures as well.

I went home that night and slept—none ; yet I was fresh and gay as a lark when I rose in the morning. My plan was nearly matured ; but before setting about it, I thought I would have a look at the building from other points than those from which I had already viewed it. A place large enough to contain a lithographic printing-press and the men working it, or to hide criminals or plunder, or enough drink to last them for weeks, I thought, could not very well be contained in the thickness of a wall, or the depth of a floor ; and we knew every room and apartment in the house. Where, then, was the secret chamber ?

An idea had struck me, which, as I walked towards the place, seemed so simple and plausible, that I roundly abused myself for never thinking of it before. The South Bridge, as every one knows who has seen it, spans a valley stretching from High Street to Infirmary Street, but the only one of the massive stone arches visible is that which crosses the Cowgate. The others are built against by the houses on either side, and are mostly used by those occupying the lower flats in Blair Street, Niddry Street, etc., as a kind of large store-rooms or great cellars. Now, as Maclusky's house could be entered either from Blair Street or the South Bridge, I knew that it could not be far from one of these arches. I knew also that the first flat, or that immediately below his house, was occupied by one of the numerous furniture-dealers, who would probably use the arch beneath as a store-room, and this store-room I had imbibed a singular curiosity to see.

I sauntered into the shop, and began to examine, as if with a view to purchase, some of the biggest and most unwieldy articles I could clap my hands on—such as sideboards, grand pianos, or loo tables. These articles, occupying a large amount of space, were, as a natural result, scarce in the front shop ; and I was soon invited through to the storeroom behind. It was lighted with gas, and was, as I had expected, one of the arches of the bridge. I scanned it eagerly, and at once noticed that it had been altered and modified to suit their purpose.

"You've a high roof here," I remarked, looking up and around.

"Yes; don't you know this is one of the arches of the bridge?" answered the young man, without the slightest suspicion. "You wouldn't think it, would you?"

"It doesn't look like an arch up there," I said, with an appearance of doubt and a look of simplicity, indicating the flat ceiling. "Arches are generally round at the top, aren't they?"

"Ay, but that's a false ceiling, or roof, put on to hide the round part," he readily returned.

"That's queer. What was that done for?"

"Well, it looked bad, and was of no earthly use. It was done a good many years ago, in the former tenant's time. You know, even ladies come here; in fact, in this little common-looking street we do more business than some of the great flourishing concerns in Princes Street and thereabout, so we like to make the show-room as attractive and nice-looking as possible."

"And what do you do with the place above?" I continued, with the greatest difficulty hiding my eager excitement under an indifferent exterior.

"Do with it?" he laughingly echoed. "Why, it's not a place at all—never was one. There never was any way to get into it; besides, I don't suppose it's of any great size—at least to be of any use to us. It's only the round of the arch, that's all."

I had begun to form an opinion of my own on the subject, which differed slightly from his; but I need scarcely say that I kept it to myself. But there was one thing more I wished to ascertain—whether the false roof was of sufficient strength to bear the weight of a heavy printing press, with perhaps a complement of printers as well.

"Aren't you afraid it will come down on the top of you some day?" I asked. "Is it quite strong?"

"Strong? I should think so; far stronger than there's any necessity for. Do you know what the cross beams are made of? You couldn't guess?"

"I don't know; p'r'aps iron."

"No, but something as strong—oak."

"That's an expensive wood to use for such a purpose, isn't it?"

"Yes, but this was part of a wreck that my predecessor had knocked down to him for a mere trifle at a salvage sale. He

thought he had got a bargain, but he hadn't; for it had been so long in salt water that it wouldn't work, or always looked wet when dressed, or something of that kind. At anyrate, that was the only use he could make of it."

At last, at last! I had got all I wanted from him. I rather think the excitement must have given me a queer look, for he seemed to think I was slightly touched in the upper storey. I took leave rather hastily, and he did not appear sorry to get rid of me. I went straight up to the Office, and had a long talk with M'Sweeny, whom I had sent ferreting in another direction. We "laid our heads together"—that is, compared notes and results—and very speedily decided on the course of action to be pursued.

Sallying forth together, we at once made for the shop of a very wealthy spirit-merchant in a certain wide and very busy street, entered, and were greeted with a stiff bow and very impressive frown by the proprietor.

"It's a fine day, Mr Slysoles," I began at once. "I should like to have a moment's talk with you."

"Haven't time—not a moment to spare," he hastily returned. "Call again."

I looked him full in the face.

"Mr Slysoles, I shall not call again, and you must speak to me now."

He cowered and looked sulky, and at last, with a very bad grace, led the way to one of the boxes.

"Not there—here," I said, sharply, pointing to his own private room.

There were more sulks, but he had to give in. We entered the room, and I walked across to a locked door facing us, and tapped it lightly with my hand.

"Mr Slysoles, in this closet there are three long flat boxes, packed full of drink, which you intended to remove to-night. Open the door and let's see them."

"I shall not!" he thundered, in reply, reddening and paling by turns. "What do you mean by this insulting conduct? Leave my house instantly."

"Very well," I said, quietly. "But you won't go without your hat and coat?"

"What do you mean?" he cried, evidently staggered.

"I mean that if you don't obey us in everything, that affair with 'the Barker' shall be brought up against you—ay, and proved to. It was a clear case of reset."

"That was a mistake," he groaned. "I had no idea I was committing a crime."

"Perhaps. You would find it a difficult job to prove it. Besides, there are other things—"

"Enough! I will do anything you wish;" and he hastily unlocked the door of the closet.

M'Sweeny and I examined the long flat boxes minutely for some moments in silence, and then I said—

"I think they'll do?"

"Yes," he returned; "but they'll need a power of holes druv into them to let in the air. Whisky's one thing, and a respectable offisher's another. Sure, it's not our coffins we want to make of them."

"Oh! I'll see about the holes; and, in case of any such accident, I'll have two or three large ones made in the bottom where they will not be noticed."

"An' sure, a few little wans in the sides won't do any harm, they'll be mighty handy for luckin' out by."

A sudden movement drew our eyes to the publican. He had sunk into a chair, and was silently wringing his hands.

"What do you mean to do?" he faintly groaned.

"Nothin', my jewel, nothin'," cheerfully returned M'Sweeny, "only to make ourselves into whisky bottles; an', begorra! that needn't distress you, for you made wan of yourself long ago."

"I cannot—dare not—allow it," groaned Slysoles. "They would kill me for it."

"That's true—if they get the chance," coolly acquiesced M'Sweeny. "But when they come to do it, you'll know that we're kill't first, an' that'll do your ould heart good, an' send ye pacibly down among your friends."

"I am ruined for life!"

"Made, ye spalpeen!—made; for if we do all we want with your boxes, sure we'll befrind you to the last day of your life."

Slysoles did not appear overpowered with gratitude at this magnificent promise; indeed, it took some very determined threatening to force him to consent to our arrangement; and then, after duly warning him against attempting to betray us, we left, singly, by the back-door.

At half-past eleven that night, we returned, after the shop had been closed and waiters and barmen dismissed, and were admitted at the back-door by Slysoles himself. M'Sweeny

had an auger, and I had a broad-toothed brace-bit and driver, and between us we soon made two of the unpacked boxes habitable. The third we did not make use of, as we had made ample provision for assistance as soon as we should require it. Knowing the desperate character of the men we would have to deal with, we each carried—a very unusual thing with us—a pair of loaded pistols ; and as we took our places in the boxes, and were fastened in by Slysoles, M'Sweeny playfully hinted to the publican, that if he betrayed us, even by a look, one of the said pistols might go off by accident, and a bullet come popping through one of the holes we had made and lodge comfortably in his soft carcase.

It was a long lie, and my bones were aching on the hard bed. Under other circumstances, the shallowness of the boxes would have excited my surprise ; but I had inspected them thoroughly, and found that, when closed, they were exactly the same depth to a hair's breadth ; and I shrewdly guessed that the entrance to the secret chamber would not be much wider. I lay watching Slysoles through one of the holes. He pretended to be sitting at ease and reading a newspaper, but I am certain, from the way his hand shook, that not a word got as far as his brain. M'Sweeny would have beguiled the time by whistling some chaste and select Irish melodies ; but that I was compelled to put a stop to.

At last, just as the Tron was giving out the hour of one, there came three gentle taps at the back door, which instantly quickened the pulses of the whole three of us. Slysoles disappeared, and soon returned, followed by six men. They were all known to me : two of them were bullies, and the other four professional thieves. No words were exchanged. Slysoles pointed to the boxes ; they seized them at once ; and soon we had the exquisite pleasure of being jolted along the street at a rapid pace on the shoulders of two-legged beasts. Our weight must have been considerable, for they cursed us heartily. At last they cut down into Blair Street, and laid us down at the bottom of the stair, while they paused to breathe and swear.

"Are ye there, ye divil?" whispered M'Sweeny to me, contrary to my injunctions. "Sure they've give me a bump on the nose that was like to take the head off me. It's bleedin' now. Only wait till I get out."

"Shut up!" I whispered, beginning to get angry.

"We are shut up," he dolefully returned. "Why don't the

villains carry us upstairs? I wonder they don't want to taste us after shweatin' under us. Bedad ! they'll find us strong—unreduced—anyhow."

"I'll fine you a week's salary if you don't be quiet."

"You can't ; I'm only a bottle of whisky just now."

I gave it up for a bad job. Presently we were lifted again, and slowly carried up the stair, and into Maclusky's house, They left us, piled atop of each other, in the passage, and then I heard M'Sweeny whispering up from below—

"I've taken a crick in my neck, and I can't ease it, my feet's as cowl'd as snowballs, an' I would give any one half-a-crown to scratch my back."

They returned, shouldered us again, and now I settled my self to watch keenly every step of the way. To my surprise, after passing through several rooms, they walked straight to a little bedroom that we had repeatedly searched without discovering the slightest trace of a hiding-place. I knew that there was no trap-door either in the walls or the floor. The bed had been taken down, and when we were laid down near the door to keep it company, I watched the movements of our rascally bearers with great excitement and interest.

They opened the door of the little room. One of them entered it, and struck a light ; and then I thought my eyes would have started from their sockets as I saw him fumbling with some ropes, which were attached to the floor and passed through a pulley fastened to the ceiling. He returned, bringing the ends of the rope with him ; and then three of them with a most musical "Gee-ho-o !" tugged and hauled, while the floor rose bodily in the air, till one side of it touched the ceiling. The bare rafters supporting the floor and the ceiling underneath were disclosed ; but something else of far more vital importance caught my eye, and riveted my attention at once. Close to the wall, and the whole width between the ceiling below and the wash-board above, was a long narrow slit, from which a stream of light was issuing, and through which I got a glimpse of a long chamber with a round arched roof.

I had no time to think. The boxes were lifted and slid down through the slit, and we landed not very gently on another floor, which was already pretty crowded with articles and men. As we did so, M'Sweeny, in a subdued tone, cursed our bearers and their progenitors to the remotest generation. At the end nearest us stood a lithographic printing-press, against which a man, in his shirt-sleeves, was negligently resting, conversing in a

low tone with another, who sat at a low table with a strong light before him, engaged in "biting up" an engraved plate. That other was Jim Maclusky! He appeared annoyed at being disturbed, and turned sharply on one of our bearers, who was fumbling with a chisel and hammer at the lid of the box which held me.

"Why the d—! don't you go?" he angrily cried.

"I won't be a minute," the man answered, prizing with quickened energy at the lid, while I felt for and quietly cocked one of my pistols. "We must have some of this stuff out."

I heard at the same time a strange commotion in M'Sweeny's box. He was trying to force off his own lid. The sounds appeared to reach other ears besides mine, for the man dropped the hammer, and the forgers started right round.

"What's that?" cried Maclusky.

"I don't know," said the man, scratching his head. "It must be a rat; Slysoles' cellar is full of them."

"Ready?" whispered M'Sweeny.

"Ready," I answered.

There was a sudden crashing sound, and I had started right up before their eyes, with my pistol levelled at Maclusky's petrified countenance. M'Sweeny was not so successful.

"Let me out!" he roared. "Bad cess to them! the nails are too tight."

"Hell and fury! Betrayed!—trapped!" screamed Maclusky, springing upon me like a wolf. I did not wish to kill him, and in the moment's delay he was upon me. The lights went out suddenly, and we were fighting and struggling like two fiends in darkness. The pistol went off with a bang, and the flash showed me an expression on his face which I feel sure must have been reflected in my own. We were knotted together on the floor; but at last he got my arm across his knee.

"Let go," he hissed, "or I'll break your arm."

"Break away."

An instantanéous crack, and dreadful pain, and I felt that my arm was useless. But still I stuck to him with teeth and nails and legs. He felt for something, and then drew a long breath.

"Let me go, or I'll run it into your heart."

His arm was drawn back. I seemed to feel that a flashing knife would in one instant be buried in me, but I held on.

"Jim Maclusky," I hoarsely answered. "Fourteen years ago you murdered M'Dermott. He had been kind to me and

mine, and I swore to trap you. Stab away ; even in death I'll stick to you ! ”

Another long breath, and I thought my last moment had come. But no ; there was a crash, a spring, and a sudden dull thud, and he dropped senseless by my side.

“ Whoop !—hurroo ! ” shouted M'Sweeny, dancing over the villain's prostrate form. “ Ye divil, how do ye like that ? The bit of a twig's as good as your knife any day in the week. ”

Then the policemen burst in upon us with their glaring lanterns, and M'Sweeny held my broken arm tightly in his hands all the way up to the Office, while they followed, bringing Maclusky and every one else in the house they could lay hands on. Though suffering some pain, I believe I never experienced more exquisite delight than that night, when I saw Maclusky, all scratched, torn, and bloody, taken away and locked up.

“ I will live to kill you, ” he said, with deadly emphasis.

“ Perhaps, ” I cheerfully returned ; and then I was taken away to have my arm set.

A rare haul of stolen property was found in the secret chamber, together with enough dresses and disguises to have stocked a theatre.

We made it so hot for Maclusky at the trial, that he got ten years' penal servitude ; and good care was taken that the arch of the South Bridge close to the house should never again be made use of in the same way.

SPIRIT NELLY'S MISSION.

DID you ever, gentle reader, in your wanderings, come unexpectedly on a lone flower, rearing its wee head in neglect and obscurity, and seeming to have no particular mission in the world but to wither and die? I think you have. You came upon it in the most unlikely place—perhaps among shaggy, frowning rocks, or in the midst of a barren waste, or on the brink of a boiling torrent, where a single spray would have swept it to destruction; but there it was, catching the faintest glimpse of the sunshine, breathing the tiniest portion of the air, unchoked by surrounding weeds, and smiling upwards, untarnished and unhurt, while it fulfilled its mission. That mission might be to set you a-thinking—perhaps to inspire you with some pure thought or kind feeling, or to point you to a holier and better life. Nature repeats itself. Human flowers crop out here and there for the same purpose and under the same adverse circumstances.

Hundreds knew Spirit Nelly, and those hundreds, looking in wonderment and awe upon her slender figure, strangely winning ways, and soft dark eyes, unearthly in their lustre, first said she was like a spirit, and then, for shortness, called her Spirit Nelly.

Spirit Nelly was just thirteen, and too white and pinched-looking to be beautiful. It was not want so much as a world of care and thought that dwelt in her oval face, and made strangers turn round and gaze after her as she glided along our smooth streets, carrying her paper screens, flowers, and other tasteful handiwork.

Nelly's father was a thief—a powerful, hulking villain, who upon one occasion had broken a policeman's arm, and nearly bitten off one of M'Sweeny's ears;—but of course she could not help that. She had tried hard to help it, or amend it, ever since she had been able to put two ideas together; but though she had a great hold on her father, crime had a stronger one, and all her schemes and plans seemed to be

thrown to the winds. Every year saw Nelly more slender and spirit-like, every year saw Tom Heath, her father, more depraved, more deeply involved with the worst of criminals, and more reckless and daring. His wife Kate—Spirit Nelly's mother—kept a cheap lodging-house, or travellers' home, away up at the top of one of those high lands in the Lawnmarket, and had a hard struggle to live. Live, did I say? She did not live. Her life was a continual death. The villain she was tied to absorbed all the profits of her house, and more; and when he failed to make up what more his pockets demanded outside in his own way, he came home and vented his fury and strength upon her. To lift up a fender or a stool and fell her to the ground were but common occurrences with him.

The only gleams of happiness that made life endurable to the poor long-suffering woman were the society of Spirit Nelly and the absence of her husband, when we had him safe by the heels in prison. Then they had happy times, and the wretched garret they retained for their own use appeared a little heaven. Singing was there, and sunshine, and quiet joy; and the rosy paper which they cut and crimped with nimble fingers into flowers then seemed positively to throw its reflection up into Spirit Nelly's cheeks.

And did they hate the cause of so much misery and unhappiness? Reluctantly I must confess the truth—No. Did they love him? Still more reluctantly, and quite as truthfully, I must say—Yes.

Spirit Nelly loved him because he was her father, because he never struck her, and because she could see good in him that no one else had eyes for; and Kate Heath loved him because—because—she was a woman, and he her husband. And so they prayed and hoped, and fought back the crushing despair which often tried to creep into their hearts; and Nelly yearned after her father as the one object which she was willing to live or die to save from crime or evil.

"But I'm afraid it's all of no use," she said one day to her mother, over the paper work which kept them from starvation. "I don't see what God sent me into the world for at all—only to be a burden to you and every one else."

"A burden, Nelly!" cried the mother, looking up at the strange words. "Do you want to cut my heart open, that you said them cruel words? A burden!" and she dropped paper, scissors, and all, to strain Spirit Nelly to her breast. "You

are all my world, Nelly ; and if you were taken I should lie down and die."

Nelly thought something which had often dwelt in her mind before, but it took a long time to bring it to her lips. Her tone was low when she answered, but every breath of it fell sharp and quick on the mother's ears.

"Ah ! but, mother, I will be taken some day, I'm so weak ; and—oh, mother ! what have I said ?"

A stony whitening of her mother's face had caught her uplifted eye, and, with a fearful pang at her heart, she drew her mother's face to her bosom, and then tried to kiss away the imprint of terror.

"Nelly !" gasped the mother, "you're always strange ; but if you love me, if you don't want to kill me, never speak such a word again."

"I won't ! I won't ! There, don't look so awful. You didn't understand me. I meant that I would perhaps not live so long—so long as some folks ; that's all, that's all, mother. But I'll live a long time yet—oh ! I'm sure of that ;" but the hasty assurances only brought the tears into the mother's eyes, and it took a great deal of kissing to get them away.

Nelly tried to throw the sunshine of a smile through her own tears, and, drawing her mother closer, whispered—

"Now, listen, mother, and I'll tell you why I'm sure : because on Sunday I heard that every one, though they should only live a day or two, has some good to do in the world. My good isn't done yet. It won't be done till father is an honest good man. Something tells me so ; and that, I'm afraid, will be a long, long time ;" and, strangely enough, with the smile of triumph there came a heavy, weary sigh. "So you see, mother, I'll be spared—oh, ever so long !"

"And you're doing the good every day," rejoined the mother, carried away for the moment by the girlish reasoning. "No one has such power over him as you, and the wonder is, that when you beseech him he does not change entirely. But he won't ; and it'll go on and on, till he kills somebody and gets hung for it, and disgraces us all for ever. Oh, wistharu ! did ever I think, when I was a young simple girl, and took him for better or worse, that I'd be the wife of a thief and a robber !"

There could be no cheering answer to this, but by and by Nelly found courage to break the silence and say—

"There's something on your mind to-day, mother ; I've seen it ever since he went out. May I know about it ?"

"You're better without it, darling," returned the mother, darkly and bitterly. "The trouble 'ill come soon enough without you knowing now."

Nelly whitened at the words, and her eyes shone out, as they always did when she was under great excitement.

"Is it danger to him?" she got out, with a gasp.

"Yes; and disgrace to us. It's the old thing over again. You might know that when you see that devil-eyed hound, Barney Flynn, come sneaking about."

"Then there's going to be a—a robbery?" faintly breathed Nelly, with a great sinking at the heart.

Her mother started forward and placed her hand over Nelly's mouth, with a fearful glance around.

"I don't know that there is; I didn't say so, did I?" she said in alarm.

"No, but I guessed it. Don't be afraid for me, mother," returned Nelly, with startling calmness. "I will not faint. I am firm and strong now. I could see the world burst in pieces and not be moved. But tell me, can we not save him?"

A mighty strength had suddenly sprung up out of Nelly's weakness, and the mother gazed on the radiant eyes and firm-set lips in amazement.

"I've thought of that, and I've thought of a plan," she hesitatingly returned; "but you're only a girl, and there's danger in it. He might kill you."

"Never mind me. He would not kill me—not though I angered him ever so," firmly returned Nelly. "I'll save him. Tell me the plan."

"I'm doing wrong," cried the yielding mother, with a burst of tears. "Evil will come of it."

Nelly stopped the words with a kiss, and waited to hear.

"But it's difficult," demurred the mother, with a look up at the clock; "besides, I'm not sure but it's too late now."

"Oh, tell me quick what it is!" cried Nelly, starting up with feverish haste, and beginning to tie on her bonnet.

"Well, they're to meet at twelve o'clock at Barney's house in the Cowgate—in the back place where they used to keep the sticks. He let it all out in his sleep last night, and I heard every word."

"It's near twelve now," interposed Nelly. "Go on."

"Well, if you could get into the yard behind, unseen, and get up by some of the barrels or barrows on to the shed, and then

crawl along the boards, unknown to them, till you're above their heads, you might hear every word they say."

"I'll do it. Well—the rest?"

"The robbery's to be to-night. If you could find out where it's to be, and keep it in your mind, we may save your father."

"Would you tell the people that's to be robbed?"

"No; because they're away from town; and, besides, they'd be all caught alike in that way."

"You won't tell the police?"

"Not exactly; for they'd have little mercy on your father. He's been there too often already. Besides, we couldn't get near the Office without being watched or seen by somebody, and the news would fly to them like the wind. He'd murder us both that way."

"You have another plan, I know you have!"

"Yes; and this is it. If you can find out all about the robbery, there's a detective called M'Govan who might be able to help us. They say he's a kind man at the bottom, and never takes a cruel advantage of folks, even when they're in his power. I don't know where he lives, except that it's either in Bristo Street or Charles Street; but if you went there, carrying your screens, you could hunt him out, and no one would suspect what you were after—not though they saw you going."

"I'll find him out, and I think he'll help me!" said Nelly, with a strange kindling of the eye.

"But mind, he must save your father; that is the condition. Make that sure before you tell him a word."

"I will make that sure."

There were only five words, but Nelly spoke them with a heavy, distinct emphasis on each, more as if impressing them on her own mind than addressing them to her mother.

"Then that's all. Fly now, like a darling; and God's blessing go with you."

Nelly did fly. She cut down the long stairs as white and swift as a ghost, crossed the street, and flew down by the West Bow to the Grassmarket, and thence turned into the Cowgate. Just as she passed under George IV. Bridge, she heard twelve strike. The autumn sun was shining bright and strong, but a great darkness had settled on Spirit Nelly's heart, and she neither saw nor felt it. She soon came to a low, dark entry, very dirty and foul, and without hesitation glided in, and made her way to a deserted yard away up behind, shrouded from the sun by the crowding, rotten houses looming up on every side.

In hurrying out into the semi-darkness, she stumbled, almost fell, over a shock-headed ragamuffin squatted on the ground, digging holes with his hands.

"Look where you're goin', can't ye!" shouted he to the child, with an oath. "There's nobody lives up there, so you needn't go."

Without uttering a word or sound, Nelly glided swiftly on and vanished. A number of unused fish barrows, and a pile of boxes and barrels, hid her from the boy's sight.

But his curiosity was roused, and he left his mud-piemaking to hunt her out and watch. He saw her get up on the roof of a donkey shed with some difficulty, scrambling and climbing, and begin to crawl along the boards to an outhouse in the next close. She looked round, fearfully, every foot of the way, and got more and more cautious in her movements, but she stopped at last.

"She's on the top of Barney Flynn's wood-house," said the boy to himself. "Whatever can she want there? I'll tell my father if he comes home to-day, for he sometimes goes in there to play at dominoes. She's listenin' like. She's not feared—I wouldn't do that for something, 'cause father thrashed me once for only asking what was inside of it. P'raps I'd better not say anything about it, in case I get another thrashing. I'd better get out of here, quick;" and with this thought he ran off and amused himself elsewhere. The odd circumstance was soon forgotten, but his boyish memory was destined to be quickened on the subject before twenty-four hours had passed away.

Meanwhile Nelly was listening. Three men were below her; and had the boards been only a degree more rotten, she would have crashed through, and dropped into their very midst. The first speaker was her own father.

"Well, I've brought the tools, and we're all here," he said. "Let's hear about the job."

"Softly," interposed another man, whose voice Nelly could not recognise, but who afterwards turned out to be Tim Regan, the father of the boy she had just passed in the yard—"softly. We must first decide which place it's to be. It'll be time enough then to arrange about the stowing of the swag."

"Well, which is it to be?" returned Tom Heath, a little tartly. "Decide that for yourselves—it's all one to me. I don't profess to be an area sneak."

"But I do," said Regan, with a soft laugh. "I'm afraid you've risen off your wrong side this morning, Tom; you're so devilish cross."

"Ugh! don't let's quarrel," interposed Barney Flynn. "Is it to be Blacket Place or Lauder Road?"

"Well, Lauder Road's the safest," replied Regan. "It's lonely, and there would be few about; but there's not so much to lift. For a good haul, I say No. — Blacket Place."

"All right, you're the best judge. Let it be Blacket Place; we may try the other again. How are we to get in?"

"At the back. There's one of the inside shutters ajar; the fastenings come loose, I think. We can easily manage it; it's only five feet from the ground."

"What time shall we meet?"

"Say twelve—at the Cemetery gate in Preston Street. We can go round by the back way, and get over the railing one by one as soon as the bobby is past. If any one is past the hour, we don't wait for him, and he loses all right to share. Is it agreed?"

"Agreed."

There was a pause after the last rejoinder. Nelly could not see it, but the three were making some peculiar motions with their hands, which bound them to inviolable secrecy and good faith. Fearing that they were coming out, she moved quicker and more unguardedly than she had hitherto done.

"What's that?" cried one, starting up.

"Rats; don't bother," calmly returned Barney Flynn.

And Nelly heard no more. She was down into the next yard with a run and a scramble, bruising and skinning her knees in the fall, but feeling, heeding nothing. People saw a scared, white face speeding up the Cowgate; but such a thing was common there, and excited no remark.

And so it came that, after what seemed an age of suspense, Kate Heath heard her daughter's light step on the lobby floor once more, and rushed to open the door and catch her almost fainting in her arms. One fear was uppermost.

"Did he see you?"

"No."

"Poor darling, you're nearly dead with fright. I wish I had gone myself, instead of flustering you."

"I'm not flustered; I'm calm and strong. You could never have managed it," said Nelly, in quick pants. "I heard all about it, and where it's to be. Get the screens ready."

"You're not able; indeed you're not. Let me go."

"Get the screens, mother; I am going. I will save my father, though I should die for it."

The words were quietly spoken, but there was a rigid determination in the tone that the mother knew it was useless to try to move. In a few moments Nelly was out in the sun again, carrying her fluttering mass of gaudy tissue paper, and hurrying southwards—on business. Yes, there was no loitering with her. People stared at her white face, fevered cheeks, and brilliant eyes, and fancied, as she flitted past them, that she was really beautiful. But they were wrong. It was a beauty of wild fear and terrible excitement—a beauty that had behind it a great rush of tears, only waiting a mere word or touch to burst forth and flood all. She began at the top of Bristo Street and worked her way downwards, taking Charles Street on the way. Had she been able to read, she might have found my house quicker ; but, as it was, she had not only to stop at every door, but make very cautious inquiries as well.

At about half-past one my wife opened the door, in answer to a very gentle knock, and was about to close it again, with little more than a glance at Nelly's wares, when some words caught her ear and made her pause. The words were—"M'Govan, thief-catcher."

"What do you say ?"

"Doesn't he live here, ma'am ?"

"Yes."

"Oh ! could I see him, just for a minute ?" and Nelly seemed to turn white with eagerness.

My wife hesitated.

"He has just come in, and he's very tired."

"Oh ! but please, ma'am, it's something very important."

"Could you not go to the Office about it !"

"I durstn't. I'd be watched and killed for it, and my mother too. Oh, do let me see him !" and with a burst of tears Nelly dropped on her knees and seized my wife by the skirt.

There was no more hesitation.

"There, don't cry, that's a good girl. Come, I'll take you to him ;" and in a few minutes I was roused out of the land of dreams, and listening to Nelly's story.

She told me all that I have recorded, and a great deal more that there is no room for ; but though the narration occupied some time, she had concluded before I had quite thought out a plan for helping her.

It did not seem to me that the task of saving her father was quite as easy a one as she had hoped and thought. I pondered and walked the room in silence, while she watched me with

tear-stained face and fevered anxiety. At last, though anything but satisfied with my plan, I looked up and said—

“I think I’ll manage it; at anyrate, take my word for it, your father shall be safe. You’d better go home now. I need not warn you against breathing a syllable of this to anyone?”

A look—one look—answered me. She seized my hand with both her own, and kissed it passionately.

“Oh, sir! if there was only something I could do for you in return, just to show how happy you’ve made me!”

“But remember one thing, Nelly,” I gravely returned. “You know your father better than I do; he will do anything in a passion. When he finds himself kept out of the way, and his two pals neatly captured, he will at once suspect treachery. If any circumstance should spring up to connect the betrayal with you or your mother, I tremble for the result.”

“But it’s for his good,” she said, with girlish simplicity. “Isn’t he better with us than transported?”

“Yes; but he may not look at it that way. Your father ought never to have been a thief; he is not unprincipled enough. He has a kind of rough honour about him, and that feeling, misapplied, will prompt him to clear himself; for, mind you, he, escaping, will be the first to be suspected.”

The tearful look of gloom that overspread Nelly’s face gave me a pang of self-reproach.

“But never mind, Nelly; it may all go well,” I cheerfully added. “I only wish you to be cautious. Good-bye.”

There was more emotion and fervent thanks on her part, and then she went away, and I made for the Office. I had much to do, but I got through it all more easily than I had expected. I had to telegraph to St Andrews for power to use the keys of the house in Blacket Place, and then had to go and get the keys, inspect the house, and arrange a plan of capture. While all this was going on, M’Sweeny was away after Tom Heath. After a good deal of trotting about, he came on the intending burglar lounging up St Mary’s Wynd. Heath was for going past with averted eyes, but M’Sweeny could not allow that.

“Well, Tom, what are ye after this day?” he cheerfully inquired, stopping the other and turning him round.

“I’m after—the tip of my nose,” scowled the other.

“And an ugly blackguard of a nose it is,” said M’Sweeny, with a grin. “If it was me I’d be feared to follow it—I’d

rather go the other way. Stop! come here. Whisht now, ye divil! I've got something to say to ye. Would ye mind goin' down to my house?"

"Am I wanted?" asked the other, with a start, and a piercing look of suspicion.

"Not a bit of it; ye're not wanted at the Office at all, at all. I swear it, man; so don't look so queer. But I want ye, and if ye're wise ye'll go."

"I'll go; but don't try any tricks with me. It'll be worse for ye if ye do."

"Would ye take a snap at me other ear?" inquired M'Sweeny, with mock fear and simplicity.

"Never mind; don't try me."

They moved up the Pleasance to M'Sweeny's stair, and then, while groping their way along the dark passage, Heath's arms were suddenly pounced upon, tugged behind him, and securely handcuffed. Before the torrent of oaths could burst from their prisoner's lips, the two policemen who had so deftly accomplished this feat, collared him and hustled him through the open door into M'Sweeny's house.

"Now, I'll talk to you," said M'Sweeny, with a grin. "'Twas neatly done, wasn't it?"

"You swore a lie!" cried the other with gleaming eyes.

"I didn't—you're not wanted at the Office—I swear it again."

"Then what right have you to keep me here?"

"No right at all, my jewel. I sha'n't keep ye at all unless ye give the word. I give ye your choice: Will ye go to the Office and be locked up for helping to plan the robbery at Blacket Place, or wait here till the morning and go free?"

"Betrayed!" hoarsely exclaimed the other. "Who has done it?"

But that was precisely what M'Sweeny wished to keep to himself.

"You haven't answered me, my jewel," he evasively returned. "Will ye go to the Office, or stay here?"

"Curses on you! I'll stay here."

"Manners wasn't taught at your school. Never mind, I forgive ye," returned M'Sweeny. "We'll have to sit up most of the night waitin' for orders; but here's dominoes. This man 'ill hold your hand for ye; so we'll pass the time comfortable. Is it a bargain?"

A sullen nod was the answer.

"And if ye've any money on ye, an' would like a drop o' something, this man'll go down for it afore the shops shut," continued the obliging M'Sweeny. "I don't drink myself while on duty; but ye're as welcome to it as if it wor your own."

This, too, was amicably arranged, and the two sat down to pass the night.

Meanwhile I had made my way to Blacket Place with other three men, and snugly ensconced myself in the room, with the shutters ajar. It was a long, weary wait; for we had to be there a good bit before twelve, to make sure of no blunder. But it was gone at last; and about a quarter-past the hour our cat-like patience was rewarded by hearing a light tramp on the gravel walk outside. This was followed by another, and some whispering, and then a shadow crossed the slit in the shutters. They had dragged something to the window; and one was standing upon it, carefully smoothing a pitch-paper over one of the glass panes. More whispering, a dull thud, a slight jingle of some escaped scraps of broken glass,—and then a hand came through, shoved one shutter in, and undid the window fastening. We crouched down, lower and lower, scarcely daring to breathe.

The lower sash of the window was raised to the top, the man outside tugged his cap tighter on his head, swung himself into the room, and then turned and waited for the other. The second made a scrambling slip in getting up, and was cursed heartily in a whisper by the other looking out on him. At last both were in, and then Flynn (I knew his voice) said—

"Close the shutters before we turn up the glim."

They did close the shutters, and bar them too—much more securely than the owner of the house had done; and then the slide of a dark lantern was turned back, and the light flashed full—on my face!

I don't think he recognised me; but the sight of a human face was too much for him. With a frightful yell he dropped the lantern, and then I had him fast. My men, with a sharp struggle and fight, throttled and secured the other; and then we took breath and turned up our lanterns.

The eyes of the handcuffed and pinioned burglars instinctively sought each other.

"Betrayed!"

"That hell-hound, Heath!" they gasped, almost simultaneously.

"Now, there you're wrong," I interposed. "Heath is as

innocent of peaching as you are yourselves; and if he had got here he would have been nabbed too; but he didn't. We took care of him beforehand."

My word was law even among thieves, and they looked puzzled accordingly. But no more was said; and leaving a man on the premises, we took them away and locked them up.

And now comes a part of my story which I wish I could cut off. My pen seems to travel more slowly as I approach it. At eight o'clock next morning Tom Heath was unhandcuffed by myself and set free, with a few words of advice, which he only received with a sullen and ferocious scowl. He did not go straight home. No; after leaving M'Sweeny's, he made for the Cowgate, where he spent some time hunting about and collecting information in various ways. Then, with bloodshot eyes, whitened lips, and twitching fingers, he made his way to the Lawnmarket.

Nelly and her mother, at the first glance, saw that he knew all, and shrank back, shivering and white.

"I've warned ye, times upon times, against betraying me or my pals," he said, with frightful calmness, addressing his wife. "You've done it again, and I mean to *kill you!*" and the last two words came out with a fierce, wolfish snap.

"Father, father! it wasn't her; I did it all!" wildly exclaimed Nelly, springing forward, and dropping on her knees before him. "Oh! kill me, but let mother live."

He pushed her from him.

"I don't blame the girl," he heedlessly continued, still keeping his eyes fixed on his wife. "You set her on to it. I've heard it all from the boy who watched her at it. Traitor! why have you only one life? Why can't I kill you twice?" and foaming at the mouth, he hurled Nelly aside, and sprang on the defenceless woman.

They struggled together; terrible screams rang out, mingled with hoarse curses; and then, with a terrific wrench, Kate Heath tore herself free, and snatched up a knife. He saw the position, felt for the poker, and then, with deadly distinctness, keeping his eye steadily on the bright weapon, hissed out—

"Lay down the knife!"

"I won't."

The poker was swung back in the air.

"Lay down the knife!"

"I won't."

"Then take it!"

With a terrific swing the poker descended—but not on the wife. No—poor Nelly, poor Nelly !

She had flown in with a rush to save her mother, and as the heavy iron caught her head, her blood spurted over her father's face and hand.

"Tom ! Tom ! you've killed my Nelly !" screamed the mother, as she flew forward and caught the falling figure.

Tom Heath staggered slowly back, and the bloody poker dropped from his hand with a dull clank. Then he slowly drew his hands across his eyes and shivered. He knelt down, and tried to take the girl in his arms.

"No, no ! not dead, not dead ! my poor wee Nelly ?"

"Run, run ! if you've a heart, run for a doctor !"

"Yes, yes ; I will run. Nelly must not die !—Nelly must not die !"

People saw a man with bloody hands, tangled hair, and glaring eyes, tearing along the streets, and thought he was mad.

I believe he was. "Nelly must not die ! Come, come !" was all the doctor could get out of him. He almost tore the doctor from the house—would have lifted him in his arms and run with him every foot of the way. But what could a doctor do ? Cut away the soft brown hair, dress the hollow wound, and recommend rest and quiet—that was all. For nearly a fortnight, in delirium and out of it, Nelly lived on ; and all that time Tom Heath sat by the bedside, never speaking, but to say one thing—"Nelly must not die !"

At last the fever was gone ; the deep eyes opened and shone with a rational light, and though she could not move, Nelly spoke.

"Father !"

It was weak and faint that sound, but he instantly started up and bent over her.

"Yes, Nelly ; I'm here—here, standing beside you."

"Something—something has happened," she faintly breathed.

"My head—did something strike me ?"

The face of the strong man twitched nervously ; he covered it with his hands, and, groaning, sank on his knees at the bedside.

"I—I—did it. I struck you, Nelly. But you're better now ! You'll soon get strong again, won't you ?"

Nelly did not answer. Her eyes wandered away out at the open window, and her mother sat down, covered her face with her apron, and sobbed aloud.

"Is that the sun that shines down on the sea over there ?"

whispered Nelly. "How bright and beautiful it is ! It's just—just like heaven !"

"Don't, don't !" groaned Heath—"don't speak of heaven ! You wouldn't go there and leave us ? Oh, Nelly, Nelly ! I have killed you !"

"Hush, hush ! No, you didn't. Kiss me, father," whispered the dying girl.

He bent over and touched her lips, and his hot tears rained down on her white cheeks.

"You must rest, Nelly," he feverishly breathed ; "you must sleep and get well."

"I—I—will rest," breathed the girl, with a faint smile wreathing her lips. "Is—is—mother there !"

"Yes—here, here, darling !"

"Let me feel your hand ; everything seems to be growing dim. I don't see the light on the sea now. Is it turning dark ?"

A choking burst of sobs was the answer.

"Hold me higher, father—higher. Take mother's hand—so. You won't—won't—steal any more ?"

"Never more, so help me, Heaven !"

"Ah, I am glad of that ! I think—I think I'm going to die now, mother. Hush, hush ! don't cry. You ought to be glad ; for father—father—"

A strange sinking, and the fading light in her eyes drew a sudden scream from her mother. At the startling sound, a few words seemed to shape themselves on Spirit Nelly's lips, but no sound came. Her eyelids drooped, a slow, heavy sigh escaped her, and Spirit Nelly was gone for ever.

No one charged Heath with her death, though all the circumstances were fully known to us. No punishment that man could inflict would have equalled what he endured. In one night his dark hair had turned completely grey. For some months he wandered continually between the Lawnmarket and the churchyard where Nelly was laid, but no one would have recognised him. He hardly ever spoke, and certainly never smiled.

At last some friends advised his wife to get him away from the scene of his trouble. Their things were sold off, and they took passage for South Australia. In that country they have done well—Heath working at sail-making, to which he had served an apprenticeship in his youth. But they have no desire to return ; and the last letter I got from them was simply a request to send them a tuft of grass or a flower from Spirit Nelly's grave.

PLAYING ON A PIANO-CASE.

FROM the creation till now women have been blessed, or cursed, with a prying curiosity which nothing can abate or eradicate. No doubt the weakness has been overcome at times under the most tempting and trying circumstances; but never, I am certain, without fearful suffering to the vanquisher. I have seen the most comical mistakes, strange positions, and tragical revelations, come of this inquisitiveness, where otherwise all would have been smooth and unruffled. Anything will do it—the steaming open of a gummed letter over a cup of hot water, and the eager devouring of its unflattering contents; the skilful opening of a jewel case to try on the gems; or the uncorking of a bottle of physic and swallowing of half a glass to make sure that it contains no spirits,—these and a hundred other trifling circumstances I have seen develop with amazing rapidity into comedy or tragedy, as marvellous by contrast as the acorn and the oak when traced to their source. Good, however, may come of an evil and itching curiosity, just as the Capitol at Rome is said to have been saved by the cackling of a few geese.

Cully M'Twig and Salmon Bob, two rather slim but determined thieves, walked leisurely along Heriot Row one cold December day, discussing in their quiet style the project of the day. Both were rather flashily dressed, and, like most thieves, were utterly unconscious of the fact that their ugly faces, cropped bullet heads, mouths like steel rat-traps, and carefully-greased "Newgate Calendars," completely frustrated any attempt on their part to look respectable.

"It's a rare chance," said Cully, as they turned into Moray Place—an aristocratic crescent, with a garden in the middle; "at a time, too, when everybody's at home, and not a chance of a job from the one end of the city to the other. They're to be gone all the Christmas week—so the grocer's boy told me; an' there's nobody in the house but one girl. To be sure, the crib is too precious strong to crack; but that only shows what a

swag there will be to lift once we do get in ; and I think the way I have arranged it, *that's* pretty certain."

"Yes, you've a splendid head for arranging," admiringly observed Salmon Bob. "It'll read capital in the papers, won't it?—especially when they put at the bottom 'No clue to the thieves has been obtained.'"

"Aye, or that the servant lies in a keritical condition," chucklingly added Cully. "But, hist! here comes the identical lass. She's been out for summat for dinner. If we'd only known it! But what if we had? the latch is a 'Chubbs,'" he resignedly added. "What a lot that man has to account for!—inventin' locks that take more than half-an-hour to pick. When he dies he'll not rest in his grave, for the curses of the whole profession will lie on it."

"Come, let's have a patter with her," said Salmon Bob, who rather prided himself on his powers of fascination. "Perhaps it may save us a lot of bother."

A pretty and sprightly young girl tripped lightly past them towards the house they had been staring at ; and to her Salmon Bob turned and made his most captivating bow. She paused and looked at the two, half-amused and half-disgusted—much, indeed, as one might be interested in the antics of a couple of jumping toads.

"If ye please, miss, can ye tell us where No. — is?" said Salmon Bob, affecting to mistake her for a lady.

"It's the house before you—the one you've been staring at ever since I turned the corner," she quickly returned. "What do you want with it?"

"Nothing—oh, nothing," said the thief, with some confusion, wincing under the searching glance of her bright eyes. "Only if the master ain't at home, p'r'aps you might know when he'll be back."

"It doesn't matter whether he's at home or not," cried Kitty, flouncing past them very sharply, "and you'd better be off, for I see a policeman coming round the corner."

Both thieves gave a sudden guilty start, and a quick glance in the direction indicated, as if ready to take to their heels at a moment's notice, and then scowled like bandits when they saw nothing, and heard the girl laugh out merrily at their palpable alarm as she retreated towards the house.

"Ha, ha, ha! you thought I didn't know you, thieves and vagabonds!" she cried, shooting out her tongue at them after she had opened the door and got inside, ready to slam it in

their faces. "Don't come near me or I'll scream on Gilbert from next door to collar you both and take you to the Police Office. Be off, now, for he's big enough to eat you both—there!" and, with a vigorous slam, the door was closed.

"Wot a viper!" reflectively observed Salmon Bob, as he turned away, crestfallen.

"Hawful," said Cully, solemnly shaking his head. "She may give us trouble; them vipers is always wakeful, and she might hear me haulin' you up."

"Oh, never fear; one's easily made quiet," calmly put in Bob, with a ferocious look. "I'll do that business, if once I'm in. Never wentur, never win, ye know. Let's go and see about the box; for there's only two days to go, and the family may pop in afore the time."

"All right; we'll horder the pianner, and hope it'll give 'em satisfaction," responded Cully, more heartily. "It's not every day ye hear of an idear like that. It'll be a quick cut to fortune."

"P'r'aps," said Salmon Bob, rather dryly, thinking of the troublesome servant in the way. "Hope there mayn't be a ditch at the end of it for us to tumble into. That girl's a roarer, and precious wide awake."

"Well, don't croak over it, seein' that I'm to run the most risk," growled Cully; and they rather moodily took their way through a few more streets, till they reached a quiet music shop, which they boldly entered.

There was only a boy in the shop, and he, perfectly unsuspecting, attended to them as if they had been the finest gentlemen in the land.

"Can you lend us, or sell us, an old packing-case of any kind, big enough to hold a cottage piano?" was Salmon Bob's first inquiry. The boy wasn't sure; but he took them to a place behind, and after searching about, at last discovered a piano-case which he said he had no doubt his employer would be glad to dispose of, if they would call again. Now, to call again was exactly what the thieves did not wish to do; so, after much higgling and persuasion, they at last got leave to carry off the piano-case, upon leaving an ample deposit money, and promising to call back for the overplus of the price.

"Just give us a card—a good strong one—to write the address on," was the next apparently simple request, and, still unsuspecting, the lad gave them one of the address cards of the

firm—a large, thick affair, bearing, in addition to the name of the firm, the words—“PIANO, WITH GREAT CARE. This side up.”

With great alacrity the two thieves now shouldered the piano-case between them, and disappeared at a quick trot in the direction of their temporary home in James Street. They were in ecstasies with their purchase. It was so roomy and large, and bore such evident marks of wear and tear, with about a dozen torn address cards tacked on here and there over the top, that no one, they reasoned, would ever doubt its genuineness. Arrived at their lodgings, they prized open the back, and found that, with a squeeze, it would have held them both. The circumstance was tempting, but they had arranged their plans differently. Laying the back of the case flat on the floor, they very deftly fastened to the inside of it four brackets of iron hoop, with screw-nails; and then, after padding the inside of the roomy case well with loose straw, and taking with him a slight refectation in the shape of a small bottle of spirits and some sandwiches, as well as the necessary tools, Cully M‘Twig retired to the inside of the piano-case, and fastened in the back upon himself with screw nails, while Salmon Bob held it close from the outside.

“Now, remember,” said Cully, as a parting advice from inside the case, “from the moment ten o’clock strikes, ye must keep yer eye on the winder of the drawing-room. I may get out then or I may wait an hour or two longer, till I think the girl’s asleep below; but you keep at your post, ready for the pull. Whenever the bobby appears, you vanish round the garding, in course, till he’s gone. As soon as I get out, I’ll lift the winder, throw over the rope, and pull ye up. Mind, no noise or anything, or ye may look out for a tenner.”

“All right. Hi! hi! hi! walk up and see the wonderful speakin’ pianner!” cried Salmon Bob, imitating a travelling showman, and beginning to thump on the front of the case with the hammer in his hand. “Suppose, Cully, that I plays a toon on ye,” and he executed another thundering rat-tan on the frail boards, in spite of a volley of hoarse curses from within. “I say, Cully, how will ye take it if the girl takes it into her head to tumble ye downstairs into some dark cellar? It’ll be nice floppin’ down on the knubbly-stones—eh?”

“Shut up, ye cursed fool! or blow me if I don’t unscrew the brackets and make ye get in instead o’ me,” snappishly returned the “piano,” who had not the sweetest temper in the

world. "Pianos is valuable, so there's no fear of her usin' me careless."

"Wait till I put the address on ye, and then I'm off to get the porters to take ye home," said Bob, rather sobered by the threat.

"Yes, and mind ye tell 'em to take the smoothest road ; for if they shake me, or knock me about, I'll be sure to cough or sneeze, which would blow the whole thing."

"Oh ! never fear," was the cool reply. "They'd only say 'twas another string broke—a base string—eh, Cully?"

"Curse you ! if you play any more of your miserable jokes on me, I'll—"

"I'm off for the porters. Keep yourself cool and quiet, and a happy journey to you," said Bob, after fastening on the address card with iron tacks ; and then the door closed, and the "piano" was left alone.

In half-an-hour Bob returned with two street porters and a hurley, and the piano-case was very soon carried down to the street, and laid flat on its back, while the thief give the last direction to the men.

"Tell them that it's the piano ordered from Roamer & Co. —they'll see the name on the card ; and say that I'll come and tune it, against the return of the family, either to-morrow or the next day. Be very careful how you lift it, as the instrument's almost new, and worth the matter of fifty guineas."

The matter seemed perfectly fair and square to the porters, even in this questionable locality. Nothing was more common than for pianos to be out on hire, and be transported from one place to another ; and it occasionally happened that street porters were called in when the ordinary hands were engaged elsewhere. After receiving a liberal fee, the two men roped the piano-case very carefully, touched their hats to Mr Salmon Bob, and tugged their load off in the direction of the west end. The house was not difficult to find, seeing that every house in the place is a main-door one, and with a rousing ring at the bell, the men announced to the astonished Kitty that they had brought the piano ordered from Roamer & Co.'s.

"Good gracious ! you've surely come to the wrong house !" cried Kitty. "I never heard of a piano coming here ; indeed, there's a piano in the house already."

"No, we haven't come to the wrong house ; you can read the address for yourself?" doggedly returned one of the men, he having a great reluctance to taking the load back again.

"There's no mistake about it ; it's ordered by the master, and the tuner's coming to-morrow to put it right against the return of the family."

"Oh ! well, I suppose it's all right," said Kitty, only half-convinced. "But where were you to put it? Did they not say?"

The men stared at each other, and in the awful pause that followed, Cully M'Twig gave himself up for lost. But no : chance or good fortune was to favour him once more. After a good scratch at his head, one of the porters very sensibly suggested—

"I suppose we'll pit it aside the other piano. If it's wrang, it could be shifted after."

With much voluble groaning and apparent effort, the men then lifted in the huge case, and carried it up one stair to the drawing-room.

"It's an awfu' wecht," said one, as he helped it to its place—"enough to break a body's back. Ye'll surely no grudge us a glass for carrying it in?"

"Get a glass from your master," briskly retorted the girl. "You've only gone and dirted all my carpets with your muddy feet. Call that a weight!" and she seized it by the end, and lifted it with remarkable ease right off the floor. "Why, I could carry it single-handed."

Grumbling audibly, the porters retired, and after carefully closing and fastening the door after them, Kitty returned to survey the new possession.

"What a pity it's closed up so fast!" she reflected, after examining the case on every side. I could then have had two whole days of it to myself before the family come back. They lock the other one, so a body never get's a chance to practise, though I can play the 'Queen's Anthem' beautiful, and that without ever learning music. The key of this one 'ill be inside. What a pity I can't get the case open, I could have such a jolly time of it! But never mind, if the man comes to tune it to-morrow, I'll tell him it's to be left open, and then won't I have a time of it all by myself!"

She bustled about, rubbing and brushing at the footmarks of the porters on the carpet and crumb-cloth, not noticing that the door was open, and that the cold draught, sweeping in from a chink of the window, ran right past the piano-case.

All at once, in the midst of her cheery scrubbing and humming, a loud and distinct sneeze from the direction of the

piano-case made her start up on her knees, and stare round into every corner in surprise.

"What's that? Can there be a cat in the room?" she said to herself; "or worse, a rat, or a mouse? I'm sure I heard something—and it seemed to come from behind that piano-case. Let me see. No, there's nothing there. Pussie! pussie! poor pussie! where are you?"

All her wheedling tones, and promises of "beefie" and "creamie to pussie," did not draw the animal into sight; nor did a strict search under tables, couches, or ottomans reveal its whereabouts.

"I'm sure I heard it. It can't be shut up in the box along with the piano?" she speculated, giving the case a sudden thud with her carpet-brush that nearly drove Cully M'Twig's heart into his mouth. "Pussie! pussie! beefie for pussie! If I only had it outside here I would beefie it. No, it's not there. My dinner! my dinner! I'm forgetting my dinner; it'll be all burnt to sticks," and, with a dive and a slam, she was gone, and the hidden thief could change his position to ease his cramped limbs, and cough or sneeze without fear.

He was strongly tempted, when the early darkness came over the houses, to draw the screws holding on the back and conceal himself in some more roomy hiding-place; but he was afterwards thankful that he had not done so, for about eight or nine o'clock he heard merry voices in the kitchen far below; and shortly after, Kitty tripped lightly into the drawing-room, bearing a candle in one hand and a tool-box in the other, and followed by a tall and enormously fat footman.

"There it is, Mr Gilbert," said Kitty, leading her visitor up to the piano-case; "and I want you to open it in such a way that I can nail it up again without anyone being a bit the wiser. They're awfully afraid of their pianos, and I never get a chance to practise from one year's end to the other. But where's the lid?"

"Seems to me that this is the lid," drawled the fat footman, stooping with some difficulty and touching the back. "There are some screws sticking out, but I don't know how they could be drawn, for they've got in head foremost."

"Can't you pull them out with the nippers?" suggested Kitty, with a disappointed look.

The footman smiled sleepily, and then grandly dusted his hands.

"No; you'd better leave it till the man comes to-morrow to

tune it. Working men are better up to these things than—ah!—gentlemen. Let's have that bite of supper, and then I'll be going."

They left the room, and Cully M'Twig breathed once more. He even began to get his tools in order, and draw one or two of the screws preparatory to getting out.

Meantime the fat footman sat in the kitchen, sleepily devouring whatever the tripping fairy Kitty placed before him, and was eyeing affectionately the steaming kettle on the hob, and the red-hot kitchen poker on the fire, which promised mulled porter and other luxuries to follow, when suddenly Kitty, whose mind still ran on the new piano, remarked: "Do you know, Mr Gilbert, I believe there's a cat or a beast of some kind in that piano-case? When I was dusting the carpet after the careless porters, I heard a rustle in the straw twice, and then I distinctly heard a sneeze."

"A beast?" echoed the giant footman, eyeing the porter she was pouring out with great affection. "More like it's a man—another sweetheart," and he tried to take his eye off the porter to ogle her, and look jealous. "Yes, thank you, warm, with a little spice and sugar."

But Kitty's paralysed look was not, as he thought, one of gentle inquiry. For a moment, as the sudden thought flashed on her which the careless words of the footman had suggested, she stood motionless with the tumbler in one hand and the bottle in the other; and then, dropping both with a crash, she screamed aloud.

"Miss Kitty! Miss Kitty!" cried the footman, with as much alarm as his corpulence would allow of, "you have quite frightened me! What's the matter?"

"Matter! there's a man in that piano-case—a thief, a robber, a murderer! I'm sure of it. I heard him sneeze! Oh! Mr Gilbert, come and help me to secure him, or punch his head with the coal hammer, or something."

But the giant footman had now turned ghastly pale, and, staggering from his seat, seized his hat, and made for the area door.

"Murderers! robbers!" he faintly gasped. "Really, Miss Kitty, you should not scare a gentleman in that way. I must leave you now. I could not stay another moment in the house. Good-bye—good-bye."

"Don't go away!—I'm an awful coward! I shall scream and go mad if I'm left alone!" cried Kitty, desperately seizing the flying coat-tails.

"Excuse me, but my time's up," was the hasty reply; and then, with a wrench, the miserable coward was gone into the darkness.

Kitty's first impulse was to run out after him, and fly along the deserted streets screaming for the police till she met some one more ready to assist her than her chicken-hearted admirer, but a moment's reflection on the risk she would run by leaving the house unguarded drove the idea from her head. Then, finding that she was not nearly so frightened at being left alone as she had expected, she closed the kitchen door, and, with a quaking heart, sat down to try and think. The first discovery she made was that she was not absolutely certain that the piano-case contained a man, and this prompted and aroused within her a strong curiosity to ascertain whether her guess were right or wrong before taking another step in the matter.

"If he tried to come out and touch me I could scream like a railway engine, and chop him down with the coal-axe before he could get his dirty fingers on me. If there's a man there at all," she very acutely reflected, "it must be one of the miserable little wretches I saw hanging about in the morning, and I am sure I could twist both of their necks single-handed."

Slipping off her shoes, and taking the coal-axe in her hand, the plucky girl ascended to the lobby above and listened breathlessly. A faint sound, like the scratching of a rat above, drew her up the other carpeted stair to the drawing-room door; where, with her ear glued to the chink at the bottom of the door, she could trace the sound to the direction of the piano-case.

"He's drawing the screws—going to get out!" she thought, almost fainting on the spot. "What can I do? If I could only fasten him in in some way till I got a policeman. Stop! I have it—the tool-box and nails. I can pretend to be trying to open the box while I am fastening it up."

Slipping across to the opposite door, she opened and slammed it loudly. The sounds from the drawing-room instantly ceased. Then, lighting a taper, she boldly crossed the landing, threw open the drawing-room door, and entered, coal-axe in hand.

"I must have that piano opened and tried," she said, in a tone the firmness of which astonished herself, as she lit the gas overhead. "Let me see: I think the back would be the best place to chop it open by, only this axe is so sharp it might

injure the piano. I must be very cautious, or I'll get into another row."

Gently lifting the tool-box round into the shade behind the piano-case, and out of reach of the cracks, which she was afraid to look at for fear of glaring eyes staring through, she noiselessly lifted one of the longest nails, placed its point against the edge of the lid, and vigorously drove it home.

"It puzzles me to tell how this is fastened," she said aloud, as she got another nail ready at the opposite edge; and then with a few bangs it also was driven home, and the thief was effectually a prisoner. Still not content, though greatly relieved at the success of her scheme, Kitty went deliberately round the edge till she had driven in at least a dozen three-inch nails; and then, while Cully was beginning to have a faint suspicion of the truth, she started briskly for the door.

"I know what will do better than anything—I'll bring it," she said as she vanished.

Cully M'Twig cursed under his breath as he had never cursed before; but in a few moments the door again opened, and his tormentor re-appeared. He knew that she was in the room, and close to the case, but he had not got his eye to the crack quick enough to see that she bore in one hand a blazing red-hot poker, and in the other a kettle of boiling water.

He heard something tap suddenly against the wood close to his head, and then a fizzing sound and a singeing smell, which filled the room, and penetrated even the case itself, told the horrible truth. The girl was burning a hole into the top of the case with a red-hot poker!

He cowered down as close to the bottom as fear and rage could prompt, and then, with a grand whizz, the hot poker was rammed through—skiffing past his bare cheek, poking round his hands and arms, burning great holes in his flashy clothes, and almost setting the packing straw on fire. Certainly it was a fortunate thing for Cully that the poker, in working its way through the thin deal, had cooled considerably, for had it gone in blazing red among the straw, nothing could have saved the miserable wretch from being burned alive. Yet still burnt, singed, and skinned though he was, the thief did not give up hope, and uttered no sound beyond a suppressed hiss of agony. Kitty heard the hiss quite as well as if it had been the loudest of yells, and, hurriedly withdrawing the poker, she snatched up the kettle of boiling water, stuck its nozzle through the hole she had just made in the top of the

piano-case, and deliberately poured in the entire contents on the wretched thief.

Now, indeed, not one yell, but a succession of yells, so appalling as almost to drive away the wits of the plucky servant girl, rose on the air out of the piano-case, and at the same time Cully made such desperate efforts to force open the boards, with such diabolical threats against poor Kitty, that, with a scream, she rushed from the room, down the stair, and out into the open air, still bearing the kettle in her hand, and shouting for the police as she ran.

At this moment I was standing chatting for a minute with the sergeant for the district at the head of Forres Street, before taking my way home from a troublesome job out at the Dean Bridge; and not a little astonished we both were to see a servant girl flying past us in a demented way, waving a brass kettle and screaming "Murder!" at the top of her voice.

I ran after her and held her fast, but still did she give forth the terrified screams, till the sergeant suggested that perhaps she was some escaped lunatic; when she recovered sufficiently to point wildly down in the direction of Moray Place with the nozzle of the kettle in her hand—

"Robbers! thieves! murderers!" she gasped out at last.

"Nonsense. Where are they?" I incredulously asked.

"In our house. I'm left in charge. There's one in a piano-case. I've nearly scalded him to death with this and a poker; then he frightened me, and I ran out. Oh! come away and catch him before he can get out," and now she dragged us down the slope with as much vehemence and eagerness as she had at first shown to get away from us.

Still doubtful whether the girl were not mad, or merely playing us a trick, I followed, and was soon shown into the disorderly drawing-room. A hollow groaning and cursing from within the piano-case instantly attracted me in that direction. A sharp kick from my toe on the box stopped the noise, and then I sharply cried—

"Hullo! what's all the noise about? and what are you doing in there?"

"Dying," dolefully groaned Cully. "She's scalded me to death. Half the skin's peeled off my face and hands already. Let me out, and get me an oily rag."

I laughed, and began to prize open the box—no easy task, so effectually had Kitty nailed it up; and then we dragged the miserable object out, as red as a boiled lobster and a good

deal uglier, and then we helped him into a bedroom opposite, where, being handcuffed and accommodated with a soft seat, his scalds and burns were roughly dressed by the sergeant and Kitty, with some strips of cotton steeped in olive oil.

Meanwhile I had been gathering the cracksman's tools in the drawing-room; and before turning down the gas to leave the room, I naturally turned to the windows to make sure that they were secure. Just as I did so, a leery whistle, understood only by a select few, came gently up from below, and peering down, with my nose almost flattened against the glass, I just caught the outline of a slinking figure crossing towards the railings below; and looking down through the chinks of the iron balcony outside, I caught the hoarse whisper of Salmon Bob.

"The rope, Cully; tip us the rope."

In went my head like a shot, and seizing the coil of rope taken with Cully's tools from the piano-case, I slung it over to the expectant thief, who instantly seized it and ran up, hand over head, with the agility of a monkey, till he crossed the iron balcony and plumped into my arms.

"Oh, Lor'! what a sell!" was all he said, and then he shook his handcuffed fists in a vengeful way, and added, "I only wish I had Cully for five minutes, I'd warm him."

"Oh! you may keep yourself cool, and be thankful you've got off so easy," I remarked. "Cully has got enough to warm him for a fortnight—scalded all over, and burnt in nearly a dozen places with a hot poker."

"Ah! I am glad of that," emphatically put in Salmon Bob. "Twas his plan, and so clever he thought it; by jingo! it serves him right."

We took him away, snarling like a trapped wolf; but Cully required a cab, and a soft cushion to sit on. They both got five years, with the comforting intelligence that they would be required by the authorities of Newcastle on another charge, as soon as the term had expired.

Kitty received much praise for her bravery, and a handsome present from her master; but nothing, I believe, pleased her so much as the admiring looks of the sergeant who had aided in the capture of Cully and Bob. He was a good ten years older than she; but love, they say, levels all, and he carried her off as his wife in the end, leaving the fat footman to pine away in grief and loneliness.

SPARROW'S FIGHT TO BE HONEST.

SOME persons seem to go through the world continually dropping smiles and cheering words. Like the glorious sun above us, they unconsciously scatter gladness and wealth in the most unseen spots, leaving, like the erratic comets that skim across our sky, a long train of light in their wake. I have met such men everywhere—by road and rail, in the open street, and deep down among our darksome closes and wynds. Their number is few, though some day, I hope, it will be much greater; but the good they do can never be calculated. Let no weary soul imagine that any kindly action, cheering word, or noble aspiration is ever completely lost. Even the lisped utterances of a child have altered the whole course of a man's life, and in the present case it will be seen that, though only overheard by chance, they exerted a mighty power over the boy whose nickname I have given above.

Bob Wiper—otherwise the "Sparrow," aged about thirteen—stood shivering, with his hands in his pockets, at the side exit from the Waverley Station, down in Market Street. Sparrow was a thief—at least, under active training for one,—and so could not venture into the station itself without danger of being speedily kicked out; and there he stood at the great gate, using his sharp eyes and ears as passengers and cabs hurried past him, keenly on the alert for anything that might come in his way, and allow him to venture home for the day to the comforts of a garret and a fire. Sparrow was sharp, but Sparrow made a poor thief; for, in spite of the best of training, he had always had a sneaking inclination to honesty and well-doing. Flipping Toby and Jack, the Kidsman—the two eminent ruffians who had undertaken his education, and who lived by making the bullets weaker hands were to fire—had often shaken their experienced and short-cropped pows over his shortcomings and weaknesses.

"Ye must pull up, or ye'll never be a good prig," Jack, the Kidsman, had said to Sparrow one day. "Ye'll only get into

a mess, and bring trouble down on the heads of us, yer own innercent friends. That all comes o' bein able to read. If I had the man wot invented readin', and moral stories, and all that sort o' thing, I'd get him in a quiet place and say, 'Take that for yer nob, for ye're an old noosance, and perwents many a honest prig's genius from dewelopin'.'"

But still Sparrow was sharp and tolerably honest-looking, and, however it was earned, always brought in more than he cost them ; so the two villains still lived in hope that he would some day repay all their pains, with interest. In his own mind, though, Sparrow had given the subject many a serious thought. His own father had taken to thieving, and died in prison, and every one else in the profession whose progress he watched or studied, seemed, in spite of the plausible tales held out to him, to endure a very large share of misery, trouble, and danger ; while, on the other hand, the most simple of their victims appeared to rise steadily to happiness and wealth. But as yet his thoughts had been too crude, and his resolutions too faint, to effect any serious change in life. The first germ of it all was to come there down at Market Street, as he stood with chattering teeth and blue cold nose outside the railway station.

Among the hurrying passengers was one gentleman, with a bright-eyed little boy at his side, whose hand was clasped in his own. The two paused for a moment, close to Sparrow's lounging-place, to wait till their luggage was brought up and placed on the cab, and the young outcast could not help contrasting their brightness, happiness, and probable after fate with his own miserable condition. Young as the child appeared, there was evidently a bond of love between him and his father, and that was a thing that Sparrow had never enjoyed, though in his heart he had often yearned after it ; but it was the words of the boy that chiefly attracted his attention, and thrilled him through as the echo of some far off thought of his own.

"Father, *I* mean to grow up like that good man, and to be kind to the poor, and to make them warm and comfortable, and to have them to pray for me and bless me, just as they bless him."

The gentleman's whole face appeared to light up at the impulsive words. Sparrow thought he had never before seen such a beaming look of happiness as that which was now turned down on the child.

"Ah ! but it is hard work to be good," said the father.

"Yes, but God is strong, and He will help me," was the art

less rejoinder ; and Sparrow heard no more, for the gentleman, after lifting the bright little fellow in his arms and kissing him, placed him inside the cab, and in a moment or two they were whirled from the spot.

Mark it well—only a few disjointed words carelessly uttered, and they were gone ; but the seed they had planted remained behind. Poor Sparrow ! he crouched closer into the corner of the great gateway, with something like a furtive tear in his eye.

“Nobody ’ll pray for me or bless me when I’m dead,” he reflected, “’cos I’m a prig ; and prigs gets all cursing but no blessing, that I ever heerd tell on. It must be nice to get up in the world, and be square, and help other coves, and walk along the street able to look the pegs in the face, with p’raps the Lieutenant of Police comin’ up and taking off his hat to ye and sayin’, ‘Glad to see ye, Mr Wiper !’ Yes, I wish to goodness I could give them the slip!—hook it away somewheres, an’ turn square. I will do it some o’ these days—blow me if I won’t !”

Thus thought Sparrow, and thus he resolved ; but I need scarcely remind the reader that he was too deeply within the toils to hope to accomplish it without a fight. He was in the power of two resolute criminals, and knew how little mercy he had to expect in the case of any recantation or withdrawal on his part. At the very outset, indeed, it seemed as if the good seed were to be effectually crushed or choked—and not by a thief either.

One long-visaged man among the crowd stared keenly into the boy’s face in passing, paused after a moment, turned back, and shook him roughly out of his vision of honesty and well-doing to the stern and practical present.

“Hollo, boy ! aren’t you Bob Wiper, whose father died in jail ?” said the man, whom Sparrow now recognised as an old acquaintance of his father.

“Yes,” and Sparrow’s answer was not very pleasantly given, for he hated the man before him as heartily as their meagre acquaintance would allow of.

“Ah ! I see what you are coming to,” said the man, gloatingly surveying Sparrow from head to foot, and dwelling on his miserable and priggish appearance. “You’re going the way of your father, and you’ll come to a worse end. You’ll certainly be hanged, Bob Wiper—it’s written in your face. Your father was a thief, and robbed me ; and do you know what the Bible says ?”

Sparrow professed utter ignorance, but expressed himself willing to hear.

"Well, it says that the sins of the father shall be visited upon the children. Think of that! He was the father, and you are the children; and it's sure—sure as fate. I never read the Bible myself, but I know that much of it, and it's true. You can't escape your fate; your coming to it fast—deeper and deeper, Bob, and a gallows at the end! Ha, ha! Good-bye—good-bye;" and, with a sardonic chuckle and a gloating rub of his skinny hands, the old monster took himself off, leaving Sparrow in deeper dejection than before. The tears came thick and fast into his eyes now, blinding him to the great gate, the long row of cabs, the passengers, lights, and even the station itself. The winter twilight was creeping fast over the city, but it was sunshine's self to the gloom that had fallen on poor Sparrow's heart.

"I've got to be hanged—that's it," he muttered to himself. "If the father's sins always comes on the children, then wot's the use o' me fighting against it? My father was a bad 'un, no mistake; so I must take the whopping as it comes, and say nothing."

Now, as the case stood at that moment, Sparrow's whole after life hung on the balance, and that balance inclined very strongly to a life of crime. Just see the effect of a hearty word and a cheering smile!

A hand suddenly grasped Sparrow through the mist of tears and shook him roughly; and looking up he saw the kindly bronzed face of a very tall and strong-looking man bent down inquiringly towards him. The man's great warm heart appeared written in his face, for Sparrow started up at once, instinctively touching his cap.

"Did ye want me sir?" he asked, noticing that the stranger carried a leather travelling trunk in his hand.

"Yes, I do; when I saw you standing there all alone, piping your eye, I thought you might as well get an honest sixpence by carrying this bag for me. Is it a bargain?"

Sparrow seized the bag in a twinkling, and trotted on by the side of the stranger, with the first ray of sunshine beginning to glimmer in his heart. There was something in the man's smile, and the way in which he said "honest sixpence," that made the boy feel ever so many tons lighter.

"Anything the matter at home?" kindly continued the broad-faced stranger. "I feel for any one that way myself,

you know, for my home's away out in Australia, and I don't know what might be happening to them while I'm here. Any of the old folks in a bad way?"

"No, sir, thank'ee; I ain't got any old folks," said Sparrow, with a dab at his eye.

"Ah! that's bad," sympathisingly continued the Australian, "but I've no old folks either, you know, and yet I get on pretty well. Sister bad, p'raps?"

"No—she died," and Sparrow choked for a moment—"she died on the streets."

"Poor girl! I'm sorry for that—real sorry, now. And you—what do you do, now? Work at anything?"

Sparrow could not answer. No, his eyes sank to the ground, where they wandered uneasily, and a flush stole into his cheeks, which mounted and mounted till it flamed in crimson over his whole face.

"I see there's something you don't care to speak about," said the burly Australian, coming to his relief, and still speaking in the same hearty tones. "Well, never mind it just now. My way is to look always on the bright side of things. I couldn't help it, not though I was to try, and it gives me a pang right through to see other folks unhappy. But p'raps you wouldn't like to tell me why you were piping your eye?"

What could Sparrow do against such kindness? They had stopped in front of a great hotel, the stranger had resumed charge of his trunk, and everything about him betokened wealth in abundance; and yet there he stood actually wasting his time on a ragged, shivering boy, picked up casually on the street, actually talking kindly and consolingly to a thief.

No, Sparrow was bad enough, and hardened too, but he could not resist that. His knuckles stole up to his eyes, where they did some private execution in a swift manner as imperceptibly as possible, and then he managed to blurt out—

"I was a-bubblin' 'cos a cove told me I was sure to be hanged. He said 'twas in the Bible that the sins of the father came down on the children, and my father being a prig, he said I was sure to be whopped for it."

"Poor lad! poor lad! he must have been a bad man that would try to put such a thing in your head," said the Australian in reply. "It's all wrong—rotten at the core—what he tried to make you believe. It's all perverted to suit himself. Now, just listen. I'm the son of a thief—a downright scoundrel—

who was transported from this very city, and afterwards shot in trying to escape, after nearly killing one of the sentries out yonder. My mother—bless her name!—who had gone out there to be near him, was nigh broken-hearted, and some people croaked away that I would go the same road as my father. I let them croak, stuck to my mother, and worked for her like a horse. Very soon, with God's blessing, our heads rose above the water, and then people changed their tune, and said how different I was to be from my father! Years rolled on, and I, the son of a thief, with a fortune at my back, became a blessing to the colony. I reclaimed more convicts on my estate than any two for five hundred miles round. Now, my lad, if there's a good impulse in you, be sure God put it there, and meant you to let it work. Never mind croakers. Put them to one side, and cut your way through everything to a noble, useful life. God will help you; and there—I don't mind giving you a trifle to start with;" and from a thick heavy purse the stranger produced half-a-sovereign, which he put into the hand of the speechless lad.

"There, now, you won't forget what I have told you?" said the stranger, smiling again in a beaming, heavenly way down on the poor outcast, who had never to his knowledge been smiled on before.

Sparrow found his voice now, and in an impulse of gratitude seized the big bony hand of the Australian, and bent over it to kiss it more passionately than ever gallant saluted lady fair.

"Forget it!" he huskily echoed; "I'll never forget one word. And I'll do it; I'll become square, and show them that I won't be hanged, nor die in prison either. I've said it often, but this time I'll go through with it."

"That's right. There, now, good-bye, and God speed!" and with a warm grasp of the hand, and another beam of the broad, honest smile, the stranger was gone, and Sparrow saw him no more.

But the smiles, the cheering words, the delicate questions, and hearty encouragement, had done their work. Sparrow was to be a thief no longer—in thought or deed. He turned away from the hotel and its shining lights; but part of their brightness seemed to have got into his own heart. Unconsciously he found himself holding his head at least two inches higher, and walking with a lightness and ecstasy that he had never known before; and in crossing Waverley Bridge to make his

way back to the den he called his home, he actually looked a policeman in the face and almost felt courageous enough to smile to him. But the half-sovereign! When he paused in his walk at lonely spots and looked down upon its bright face, as it lay in his not very clean palm, he could not contain himself, but at once executed a wild caper and double shuffle that would have alarmed a spectator for his own sanity.

"I'll give them half," he said to himself, thinking of the two thieves who gave him food, shelter, and education, "and then I'll cry quits and leave them. I'll buy some papers or something, and try to get on somehow. Don't care though I've to starve ever so much at first; I feel so comfortable and nice thinkin' of it that I'm ready to stand a great deal."

Ready to stand a great deal? Poor struggling lad! how little did he know how sorely his words were to be tested! In the midst of one of his double shuffles—the last that he expected to indulge in unobserved, as he was now near High Street—a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and he found himself confronted by the not very pleasant face of Flipping Toby, who, being of Irish extraction, was always hot-blooded.

"You're a cursed fool," said the old thief, angrily, as an opening remark.

Sparrow started and hung back in surprise.

"What's up? What have I done?" he said at last, very coolly.

"Done? Come on, and I'll tell you," snarled the thief, leading the way down the dark close to their den. "Ye've gone and lost a good swag. I watched ye crossing the Waverley. That bag had something in it worth nailing, I'll swear; but you, you cursed ninny, coolly handed it back to the clumperton at the hotel door, when a slip away from the crowd, or a good bolt, would have done the thing clean. Bah! you'll be hanged some day, and serve you right for being such a bungler."

"I'll never be hanged or lagged either," firmly returned Sparrow, following his master up the long dark stair. "I've made up my mind on that."

"Hump! We all does that till the beaks gets us, and then we find that we're wrong," sneered the thief.

"We?—we?" echoed Sparrow, rearing his head in the air with the hauteur of a gentleman, and looking round with undisguised contempt on the garret which they had now entered. "We? Blow me if I know what you mean."

"Why, I mean us—us honest prigs, of course," returned

Flipping Toby, with a wink over at Jack, the Kidsman, who was superintending a savoury-smelling stew of steak and onions. "Don't we, Jack?"

"Certainly we does," was the calm response. "We're all honest prigs, and the man amongst us that says he's not had better look out for his nob."

"Then hear me : I'm not a prig," hotly and boldly returned Sparrow, with a flashing eye and flushed cheek that they had never seen on him before. "I've sworn it, and only came up to let ye both know—from this minute I'm square!"

The thief at the fire dropped the fork from his hand and stared at him in mute surprise. Flipping Toby first scowled fiercely, and then burst into a loud derisive laugh.

"Ho, ho, ho! I like that—I do indeed," he cried when he had finished. "He's risen off his wrong side to-day, hain't he, Jack?"

"Looks precious like it," sullenly returned the other, still scowling at the boy. "P'raps ye think because we've had a run of ill-luck that it's always to be so. Now, there you're wrong, Sparrow; so just sit down and I'll tell ye all about the job I've engaged ye for. Come on, have some peck first; business ain't good on an empty stomick."

"I don't want any job, or any peck either," defiantly returned Sparrow, still keeping up a bold front, though inwardly not without some dread of the ferocious and lawless men he had to deal with. "If you've got anything to tell me, I can hear it standing."

The villains exchanged glances, and by a swift movement Flipping Toby got between Sparrow and the door, which he locked securely, putting the key in his pocket. Then, coolly turning up the cuff of his coat sleeve, and bringing out a "neddy" from a corner, he turned to the boy and sternly pointed to a seat.

"Sit down," was all he said; but the look that accompanied it, with the deadly weapon dangling in his powerful grasp, did more to overawe the boy than the words. Sparrow prudently obeyed, and the ferocious thief allowed his features to relax into a grin.

"I thought so; but don't try it again. I'm a devil when I'm roused," he remarked, tossing aside the "neddy." "Now, Jack, go ahead."

"Well, there's a little snakesman wanted for a job out at Morningside, and I've agreed to supply you, Sparrow, and go

shares with the swag," said the other thief, addressing the boy in his pleasantest tones. "You're not so very stout yet, and could take a look at the little window aforehand, and see that it's not too tight a fit. It's No. — Church Lane; but I can go out wi' ye to-morrow. It'll be a good job, for there's nobody in the house, and lots to lift, and it don't come off till Monday night, so you can take it easy and enjoy yourself till then. And I say, Toby, isn't there a matter of three-and-six up there in the cracked mug that we could spare for him to have a night at the theatre with?"

"Dare say there is," growled the other, still sulkily. "But he'd better not try any more airs; we're not going to have all our trouble for nothing."

"Certainly not; Sparrow sees that himself," smoothly returned the deeper villain, bestowing an ingratiating smile on the quaking boy. "So come on an' have yer supper, Sparrow, and let's have no more rows."

If Sparrow could only have dissembled till he was safe, all might have been well; but then one of his worst faults as a thief was that he could not dissemble. The truth, good or bad, always stole into his face and eyes, and there the thieves now read it before he ever opened his mouth.

"I've told ye already I'm not a prig, but a square cove," he said, as calmly as he could speak. "I've owed ye five shillings this some time back, and I mean to pay it now; so if ye've five bob handy, hand it over," and he produced the half-sovereign, which was at once pounced upon.

"Good lad, Sparrow!" cried the thief by the fire; "you're just the man for the job. I thought there was some mettle in ye."

"So there is; but I'll thank ye for the change, and then I'm off," was the sharp reply.

"You're what?" exclaimed both thieves in a breath, with a great start of amazement.

"I'm off—goin' to prig no more," bravely returned the boy. "If I've got to suffer hunger and cold as a prig, I can't suffer no more as a square cove; besides, my mind's made up to go that way, good or bad, and when I make up my mind there's no shaking me."

They knew it, both of them, for they had seen it in him dozens of times before; but the thought, far from consoling them to the sudden change, only served to rouse their fury.

"What! ye young, prating gospel-grinder!" roared Flipping

Toby, who had the reputation of having once killed a man. "Do you think we're mad? Unsay them words, or I'll kick the life out o' ye;" and in a moment Sparrow was in his powerful grasp.

These frightful words one would naturally think would have completed the victory over the defenceless boy, who had hitherto quivered visibly on his seat. But no. Sparrow forgot all his fear in a moment; the crushing threat had only inspired him; and, with an unnatural strength, he wrenched himself free, leaving the collar of his jacket in the ruffian's hand. There was a dangerous light in his eye, too; and it did not escape Toby's eye that he was slinking back towards the spot where lay the neddy he had thrown aside.

"Look here!" shouted the boy, raising himself to full height. "Let me go quietly, and you're safe; lay a finger on me, and I peach!"

Flipping Toby gave a roar like a caged lion, and would have sprung on the boy and throttled him in an instant; but the smooth-faced thief by the fire, pale to the roots of the hair, interposed with a gentle wave of the hand.

"Peach?" he faintly echoed, stealthily eyeing every flitting expression on the boy's face. "That's an ugly word, Sparrow. Toby, I believe, has flipped a man for less. What do you mean? Peach what?"

"Peach all—all I know about both of ye!" defiantly retorted the boy. "Not about this job alone, but every one I know of. If I've only to crawl, I'll get up to M'Govan; and once he's after ye, ye've little chance."

Toby uttered another roar, but was still waved back by Jack, the Kidsman, who turned to him with an unmoved countenance, and resignedly shook his head.

"I think it is a bad case," he said, very gravely and coolly. "I'm afraid it's got to be done after all—we've got to kill him."

Toby waited for no more, but was through the air like a great tiger springing on its prey. Screams, shouts for help, and piteous entreaties for mercy, swelled upwards and spread abroad through the crowded lanes on every side; but there came no answering voice to cheer and save the little martyr. Kicked, beaten, and bruised, bleeding like a sheep, and almost senseless, Sparrow was at last hurled in a corner by the ruffians, who had hung over him like a couple of demons, vainly trying to extract from him an oath of secrecy.

"No!—peach!" were the last words he managed to gasp out, and with the effort his senses left him.

What they said or did after thus amusing themselves, or whether they then quarrelled and fought amongst themselves—not an unlikely occurrence—he could never tell; for when he woke it was well on in the morning, and he found that he had been removed a stage higher in the world, by being placed between the ceiling of the garret and the rafters supporting the slates above. Great care had been taken to make his imprisonment secure by chaining his left ankle to one of the rafters forming the floor of the hide; but this precaution was little called for, seeing that he was hardly able to move a joint with stiffness and pain, and in such dreadful agony with his side that the slightest movement almost took away his senses.

Poor Sparrow! This was the beginning of his fight to be honest—half murdered and thrown into a wretched hole, chained like a dog, with only the faintest gleams of light coming in on him from the broad heaven above through little chinks in the roof. He moaned and tossed through the long hours, only half-conscious of the tolling of the church bells, and then, in a half-delirious way, he remembered the words of the Australian, "God will help you." Sparrow didn't know much about God, the Bible having always been a forbidden book to him, but he had heard of people praying to Him when in trouble; and now he got his shaking hands together and looked upwards and moaned out, "Oh, God! help me to be honest; oh, God! make me a square cove; help me never to give in."

Sometimes he noted with surprise that he had stopped praying, and was dreaming the strangest fighting dreams, in which Toby and Jack were always kicking and murdering him and he was always on the point of giving in, which last though so distressed him, that he generally woke up and set to again to moan out his little prayer. At other times he thought a kind, beautiful woman, with beaming eyes, and a face all radiant, came flitting in through the roof, looking just like the mother whose love he had never known, and took him gently up in her arms, and eased his dreadful pains, and kissed his cheek, and soothed him to sleep, and said that he would be better by and by; but when he awoke she was always gone, and nothing there but the bare rafters, and, perhaps, Toby's horrible face looking in on him with taunts and grins.

At last the dreadful truth flashed on him, and he started up into wakefulness at the thought.

"I'm going to be mad!" he muttered to himself in a horrified whisper. "I've heard of people going mad when they got badly whopped; it's the fever gets into their heads and does all the mischief. Oh! God, help me, as you did the gentleman wot gave me the half-sovering! Make me that I won't kill anybody when I'm mad. Send somebody to take me out of here; and let me die with the fresh air blowing on me; and let me go to my mother. I'm sort o' wanting to die now; then I wouldn't feel this pain in my side. If I could only holler out, or get some one to take a message to M'Govan—he would be so glad to help me. A message? There's plenty bits of paper about, if I'd only a pencil and could write better. I must do something before I'm mad. Let's see—there's chalk there; if I could rub it to a point and write with that; but that wouldn't mark on white paper. I used to have a bit of pencil, but I'm afraid I lost it."

Eagerly, and at the expense of much pain and groaning, he felt every pocket, and at last got, not a pencil, but a small scrap of broken lead that had once been in one, deep down in the lining of his waistcoat. With this and a scrap of paper picked up in the hide, he manufactured one of the queerest epistles that ever man was puzzled to read. It was folded small, and outside was scrawled in large eccentric letters—

"TAKE THIS TO M'GOVAN, THE DETECTIVE, AND GOD
WILL HELP YOU."

Inside it ran thus :—

"Oh, sir! come and help me afore I go mad. I'm Sparrow, whom you've often had your eye on. You used to watch me down at the station. I'm tryin' to be a square cove, and God will help me. They've nearly killed me—Toby and Jack—and I'm goin' mad. I'm under the slates. Oh, let me out! 'cos I'm sort o' wantin' to die now, with the fresh air blowin' on my face. Come quick, as they're after something on Monday."

Having finished the painful task of writing this strange letter, Sparrow managed to slip it through one of the chinks of the roof; and thus, with many a prayer, it was committed to the mercy of the winds. Whither it fluttered during that long night I know not; but on Monday morning it was picked up in College Street by a working man, who curiously unfolded it and vainly tried to decipher its superscription and contents.

This man was a printer—that is, what printers call a pressman—and his curiosity not being satisfied, he carefully refolded the scrawl, and took it with him to the printing-office,

where it was submitted to the most expert readers of bad manuscript among the composers. The result was the translation which I have given above, which was no sooner made out than it was sent over post haste to me at the Head Office.

The letter did not enlighten me much, for it gave no particular locality, and the whereabouts of Toby and Jack were not quite so well known to me as I could have wished ; added to which, I was in the habit of seeing so many faces of one kind and another that I could not remember that of Sparrow from among the crowd.

However, I did manage to sight Jack, the Kidsman, in the course of the day, and from that moment, in spite of his dodging and cunning, I never lost sight of him. At last, seeing that his suspicions were aroused, and that there was little chance of him turning his nose homewards, I put another man, whose face was less known than my own, upon his track, and Jack at once fell into the snare, and made for Fowlis Close.

I waited patiently at the Office, till word came that he was safely housed, and then with a strong *posse* of men took my way up to the garret. Without knocking, I made a sudden crash at the door to burst it open ; but it was too strongly barred, and it stood firm, while the savage voice of Flipping Toby instantly demanded—

“Who’s there?”

“The only friends ye have in the world—the police,” returned M’Sweeny, who was getting the point of a strong lever in at the hinges of the door. “Open quick, or yer dure ’ill suffer, an’ mebbe yer own sweet self along wid it.”

There was no answer, but a hasty shuffling and stowing away of awkward implements, which we had heard too often before not to perfectly understand, and the next instant the door went crashing inwards, and we swarmed into the room, seizing and handcuffing the two men in a twinkling.

“What’s it for? What have we done?” smoothly demanded Jack, the Kidsman, trying to laugh to hide the fear quaking through his miserable frame.

“What job were you after to-night?” I coolly returned, looking him through and through.

He started back as if he had been shot, and glared suspiciously at Toby, whom he instantly favoured with a tremendous kick on his shin bone. Toby uttered a roar of agony, and would have instantly sprung on him ; but he was dragged

back, and for some minutes nothing was heard but the dreadful oaths and appalling threats of the two men as they each accused the other of treachery. The moment, however, that I got up on the rickety table, which M'Sweeny had to steady with his hands, and began tearing away a sheet of paper covering part of the ceiling, their noise was hushed in surprise, and the pallor of their faces increased at every blow.

A faint moaning above lent power to my hands, and at last I got my head through, and then clambered into the hole above. It was dark—pitch dark; but I felt about, and soon came on poor Sparrow. He was perfectly delirious, and fought against me with all his strength the moment I tried to raise him. A candle was handed up, and then Sparrow's strength gave way and he sank back, groaning—

"Oh, God! help me to be a square cove!"

"Poor wee boughal!" cried M'Sweeny, with a furtive dab at his eyes, as we unlocked the manacle that fastened his slender ankle to the rafter. "Raise him up gently—very gently,—for there's something wrong with his side. I'll swear that by the way he's always houlding it. Now, boys, look out below, an' don't shake the poor lad, for he's so bad that there may be a hanging match over it."

Thus he was handed down before the eyes of the ruffians, all begrimed and bloody, and tossing and moaning in brain fever; and thus he was carried off to the Infirmary on a stretcher, with a great inquiring crowd following and swelling at every step, treading on each other to get a glimpse of his white face and widely opened eyes.

"Puir wee chap! some scoundrels set on him and nearly killed him," cried one woman in the crowd; "what an awfu' blow it'll be to his puir mother!"

Alas for poor Sparrow! if the woman had only known it, he had no mother, nor no father, nor no nobody; and he lay there alone in the world, and just on the brink of the grave, with no one even to say, "Well, I hope he'll live."

But he didn't die, for all that—oh, bless you! no. A determined fight after honesty and well-doing is not always defeated; and Sparrow's fractured rib slowly mended, and the fever left him, and his senses came back, and then he found he had far more friends than he had ever dreamed of. Gentlemen and ladies who had heard of his case came miles upon miles to see him, and talk to him, and take his hand, and leave money to help him to start in life when he got out again. But of all

the sovereigns, and half-sovereigns, and bank notes, and half-crowns, and pennies that were laid on his pillow, Sparrow valued none like the Australian half-sovereign which I had taken from the pocket of Jack, the Kidsman, and which I brought out to Sparrow when they got their sentence of ten years a-piece. Nothing would satisfy him but that I should put a hole through this bright gift of the hearty Australian, that he might hang it round his neck, and feel it close to his heart, and take it out at times to worship it and wish that the frank giver could see him now. As soon as he was fairly recovered and discharged, Sparrow took out a hawker's licence and became a travelling merchant, his chief goods being cutlery and smallwares. In truth, I am bound to say that at first he had many a hard struggle to make ends meet; but perseverance won the day in the long run, and Sparrow that was, but Mr Robert Wiper that is, is not a hawker, but an active commercial traveller, earning upwards of three hundred a-year from a large firm in Sheffield.

POOR PEEP, THE CRACKSMAN'S DOG.

IN the last sketch the reader had but an imperfect glimpse of the ferocious ruffian "Flipping Toby;" but enough was shown to satisfy the most foolhardy that he was a man not to be trifled with—a criminal of the lowest type, who, when roused by passion, became little better than a wild beast, and harmless only when locked in a padded cell. Toby was a wanderer, and as often favoured the towns along the east coast of Ireland with his presence and skill as he did "Auld Reekie;" but he had a liking for this city, and when not in prison, hung about it far longer than was comfortable to us or the community at large. The ten years' sentence recorded against him in the sketch would have been a trifle to Toby, even if it had been completed, which it certainly was not; and I don't know how long or how often he would have cursed us with his activity and strength, had the following incidents not occurred. I relate them more on account of the ugly dog "Peep," which followed him like a shadow, and was, if possible, more ferocious than its master, than from any desire to perpetuate the memory of the cracksmen. Peep was a mongrel bull-dog, with cropped ears, and only half a tail, and with as sharp a set of teeth as ever gleamed in the eyes of the police. More: he was an out-and-out criminal, and would steal any article that his master chose to touch with a thumb dipped in anniseed, though he had to wait a whole day for the chance; but Peep had one good trait in his character, and it is that which I mean here to bring out.

One fine evening in spring, Robert Clunie, a medical student, residing in St James' Square, took it into his head that the locality was not the most reputable in the world, and resolved to shift to a lodging in the south side. Clunie, not being blessed with an overplus of money, resolved to effect the removal as economically as possible; and so, having packed up his few books, medical instruments, and valuables, in an iron-bound trunk, and fastened a writing-desk and some other stray articles on the top, he engaged a hungry-looking lad off the

street to help him to carry the whole. Clunie had no pride about him, but took the handle of his trunk as coolly up the Bridge as if portorage had been his every-day occupation; but by the time Hunter Square was reached, his arms were both so strained and sore with the great weight that he instantly voted that they take a rest; and as he wanted change of half-a-sovereign to pay the lad, he invited him down to a tavern to have a glass of beer—an offer which was accepted with great alacrity. The trunk was left on the street, Clunie only once glancing at it, and saying dubiously—

“But will it be safe there till we come out again?”

“Safe!—ay, as safe as oorsel’s,” was the emphatic reply, and then the two vanished down the steps.

They were not long down—five or ten minutes at the most. The lad swallowed his glass of beer and lighted his pipe, while Clunie got the required change, and then both slowly ascended to the street. The first glance at the clean, dry causeway, and they started and stared, and stared again.

“Where’s the box?”

The cry escaped them both at a breath. The street, cabstand, hurrying passengers, and everything outside was there, precisely as they had been left, but the box had vanished. They looked round in every direction, and even sprang wildly along to the head of Blair Street, but not a trace of the student’s possessions was to be seen. Not a soul was near, either, but an innocent-looking ragamuffin, who was diligently playing a solitary game of “bools” in the smooth gutter; and to him, in desperation, they addressed themselves.

“I say, laddie, did you see any one run off with a box, and a desk, and some things?”

“No, never saw anybody,” was the cool and indifferent answer; and the ragamuffin resumed his “bools” with even greater assiduity.

“I’ve been robbed!” gasped the student, in horrified accents; “robbed of all but my money—books and papers that I wouldn’t have lost for ten pounds. Where’s a policeman?—never to be had, of course, when they’re wanted.”

“The Office is just up there,” suggested the lad who had assisted him, scarcely less concerned than he; “better gang up at ance.”

The sharp-eyed ragamuffin so diligent at his “bools” slightly raised his head at the words “ten pounds,” and mingled with the crowd that instantly gathered about them; but as the two

made for the Police Office, the crowd dropped off, leaving the boy alone ; and before the student could turn down into the pend, he was touched mysteriously on the arm.

"I think I knows something about yer box," said the boy, with a cunning leer, speaking in a whisper.

"Then follow me into the Office and state what you know," was the unsuspecting rejoinder.

"Oh, hookey !" grinned the boy, laying his finger flat on his nose, with a knowing wink ; and without another word he bolted down the nearest close. But the student was nearly as quick, and made up to him, breathless, about half-way down the close.

"Come, now, tell me what you know of it, and I'll pay you well for it," he said, more gently.

"Send away the man, then," cautiously returned the boy, indicating the porter, who was just coming up ; and so stringently did he insist upon this point, that the lad was at last paid and dismissed.

"Now, what do you know?" again demanded the student.

"I think I saw two men take it between them and run off with it—down Blair Street."

"Two men? What were they like?"

"How much will ye give me to tell?" was the cunning rejoinder. "Ye said ye wouldn't have lost it for ten pounds."

The student now, for the first time, had a dawning perception of the truth, and with great interest looked down on the twinkling eyes and matted hair of the boy for some moments without speaking. It was a case of ransom, and the sly thief before him was the tout in advance. It so happened, however, that the student himself was not destitute of cunning, and he certainly was about as unscrupulous in regard to promises as it was possible for the thieves themselves to be.

"Look here," he said at last ; "I understand you now. I will give five pounds if I get back my box and its contents whole and entire. Will that do?"

The boy's face clouded into quite a network of puckers.

"I don't know," he said, uneasily. "I would need to see the 'Flipper.'"

"The flipper? What does that mean?"

"It means a man that shoots another man. Toby shot a man, so I heard ; but I don't know if it's true."

"Indeed? Then I wouldn't care to have much to do with Toby," very sensibly returned the student, shrinking a little.

"Oh, he's right enough, if ye don't cut up treacherous," coolly remarked the boy. "But if ye did, keep out of his way—that's all! D'ye want me to find him out, an' say five pounds?"

There was a much longer pause this time before the answer came. In strict truth, the student had not five pounds in the world; and more, he so prided himself on his superior sharpness and cunning, that the idea of losing the box was simply preposterous; but then, to face a "flipper," and actually meditate treachery the while—he might well pause and look grave over attempting it. Had I been in Clunie's place, knowing Toby as I did, I candidly confess I would have let the box go; but the student was ignorant, and thought himself clever—a state of things fraught with danger at the best.

"I agree. Find him out, and say five pounds," he answered, as soon as his plans were made up, gratuitously adding for the boy's information, "the books and rags would not bring him a third of that if sold."

"Come on, then," cried the boy, with evident relief, leading the way down the close to the Cowgate. "Ye'll have to follow me; and mind ye keep a quiet tongue in yer head to Toby."

With this terse advice he hurried on up the low street, and soon turned into a narrow entry, so dark and slimy that the student shrank back instinctively.

"Come on," cried the boy encouragingly; "ye've got nothing to lose, I suppose, and they can't eat ye."

Clunie said nothing, but plunged in, and soon found himself in a back-yard, facing a kind of broker's store-room, and close to the last common stair in the entry.

"You'll have to wait here and keep dark," said the boy in an anxious whisper, showing the student into the stair-foot without ceremony. "I'll get out again as soon as I can;" and then, with a peculiar whistle, and a knock at the opposite door, the boy was gone.

Clunie peered out sharply as the door of the out-house was opened, but he could make out nothing but that the place seemed stored to the very door with old and broken furniture, which was either too worthless to sell, or was kept there merely as a blind to what went on behind. Upon this point, however, Clunie gave himself no time to think, for the moment he was certain he was alone and unobserved, he whipped out his pocket-book, tore out a leaf, and scribbled down the following urgent message—

"The LIEUTENANT OF POLICE.

"SIR,—I have been robbed of a trunk full of valuable books and papers by a man called 'Flipper,' or 'Toby,' who offers to let me have it back for five pounds. Please send down a strong force of men to aid me in his capture. I will endeavour to hold him in talk till they arrive. The locality will probably be known to some of the detectives—a common entry leading into a yard a few closes above Blair Street. The thieves' den appears to be a kind of broker's store-room.

"ROBERT CLUNIE, Medical Student."

This hasty scrawl, and a shilling along with it, Clunie thrust into the hand of a rather stupid Irishwoman, who happened to come down the stair upon some errand of her own, and implored her to run up to the Police Office on a matter of life and death. Luckily the woman could not read; if it had been otherwise, I question much if she would have lent herself to betray such a dangerous customer as Toby, to say nothing of him being a countryman of her own. However, away she went, as fast as her old shanks could spin; and scarcely had she vanished when the door of the out-house slowly opened, and the towsy head of the boy was cautiously thrust forth. A low whistle speedily brought the student to his side—thankful for the gathering twilight to hide the guilt on his face, and beginning to heartily wish himself safe out of the adventure.

"Ye're to come in; Toby 'll see ye himsel'," whispered the boy; and in another moment Clunie was drawn in, and the door shut and locked behind him.

Picking his way after the boy through piles of broken chairs, rotten sofas with the stuffing hanging out, torn carpets in heaps, legless tables, and decayed bedsteads, Clunie at last came upon a snug recess at the back, where there was a fire, a bed, a table covered with a smoking meal, and seated thereat two of the most repulsive-looking ruffians that he had ever clapped eyes on. The moment he appeared, the dog Peep sprang up, growling and snapping in spite of every remonstrance from its master, and finally pinned him by the trowsers so firmly that it took great throttling and kicking to force him off. It would be a nice question to decide whether the dog was really finer in instinct than the man, and actually suspected treachery.

"Slop tells me ye want a box that two gentlemen, friends o' mine, found and took care on at no manner of expense and trouble to themselves," coolly began Toby, in his usual hoarse tones. "He says five pounds, but that's too little. Hows'-ever, if ye've got the money with ye, I don't know but we

might—eh?” and he looked significantly at the other ruffian, who nodded sulkily, and said—

“We might—yes.”

“I have not the money with me,” answered the student, quaking inwardly at the aspect of things, “and it will cost me some trouble to raise the sum;” which was perfectly true, and brought clouds to the faces of the thieves in a moment. “But before I do anything in the matter, I would require to be assured that you really have my box, and intend to keep good faith with me in its restoration.”

Toby turned sharp round, and glared on the student with a ferocity that would have made a more experienced man sink into his boots on the spot.

“D—n it! what do you take us for?” burst forth Toby, bringing his hand down with a ringing thud on the table. “We’re gentlemen—honourable prigs—as never breaks our word or plays double, and what more would ye have? If it’s shuffling ye mean—treachery,” and Toby snatched up a cudgel with a loaded head that might have felled a Bengal tiger. “If ye only want to gain time to put the spots on our track, ye’d better never have been born!” and the thud of the cudgel on the table sounded like a death-knell to the student’s hopes. “I don’t mean to brag, but I’ve got enough of quod for a while, and don’t mean to get into it again without a fight.”

“That’s k’rect, and I’m in with him there,” acquiesced the other ruffian, with the most business-like coolness. “The cove that peaches on us may order his coffin, for though he had nine lives he would have no chance.”

“How much money have you got?” snarled Toby, turning to the student. “Turn it out, and let’s see—quick, now, unless ye want us to take it!”

“I have about ten shillings,” quickly answered Clunie, producing his purse with a shaking hand, and fairly giving himself up for lost.

“Hand it over; and you’ve a ticker, I see,” added Toby, grasping at the money. “Let’s see it. Ah! only silver ’Twould only bring us about fifteen bob. Look here, now. Suppose we take the ticker and this for security, and carry home your box and things, will you fork over the rest at once—honour bright?”

“I will,” joyfully echoed the student, glad to say anything, and with a faint hope of meeting a policeman on the way; and then his conscious guilt and confusion were hidden just in time

by Peep, the dog, making another growling dart at his leg, and getting a fearful kick from his master for his pains.

But the dog this time, though driven off, would not be silenced, but ran to and fro, sniffing uneasily at the door, and whining and howling in a way that would certainly have attracted notice had its master been less angry and less intent on the business in hand. A quantity of the lumber was hastily removed, and there underneath was disclosed the student's box and desk, as snug and safe as when he had last clapped eyes upon them up in Hunter Square. Tugging on their fur caps, the two thieves seized the box by the handles, turned down the light, and picked their way to the door, followed by Clunie and the boy. But the dog was already there, whining in a subdued way, with one eye on the door and the other fixed fearfully on his master; and for the first time Toby noticed the circumstance.

"What's wrong with the dog?" he said, stopping short and peering down at it through the gloom. "I couldn't have hurt it just now? Peep, what's up?"

Peep gave a peculiar snap, with a sniff at the bottom of the door and a lowering of the eye that at once alarmed the thief.

"There must be spots about," whispered Toby; "hush, all of ye, while I listen."

There was a breathless silence for some moments, during which the heart of the student went like a sledge hammer; but not a sound, not a footstep was to be heard without.

"There's nothing, ye cursed liar!" cried Toby, furious in a moment, snatching out the cudgel from his pocket and dealing the dog a stunning blow over the head. "Take that, and learn better sense."

The door was opened—the two thieves, box and all, got out into the yard, and the student was about to follow, when Toby started right back against him. The deepening shadows round the yard had suddenly sprung into life, and the trapped thieves saw themselves circled and hemmed in by at least a dozen policemen. Glad of any chance to lay hands on "Flipping Toby," and put him out of mischief's way, I had hastily got together as many men as I could lay hands on, and hurried down and quietly filled the yard.

"Betrayed! nabbed!" cried Toby, as he sprang backwards, with a roar of fury; and then in an instant he had whipped out the knobbed cudgel with one hand, while with the other he seized the unfortunate Clunie by the throat swung him right

round into the middle of the yard, and dealt him a fearful crashing blow over the head. The student dropped like a stone, and then, before the men could throw themselves upon him, Toby had dashed forward with all his weight, cleared a way right through them, and vanished like a shot down the entry.

But he got no further. I had seen him at the trick before, and guessed that he would not be slow to try it again ; and so, instead of finding himself flying down the Cowgate in darkness and freedom, he only felt himself plump right into my arms. I was instantly carried over with the shock, down into the dirty gutter ; but I stuck to him, tooth and nail, and we rolled over and over, fighting, scratching, and shouting, till the rush of men came down the entry and pinned him by legs, arms, hair, and boots. Even then he wouldn't give in—oh, no ! not he. He wriggled and yelled, and exerted his prodigious strength to the fullest extent to break free, and that to such purpose that his example was catching, and the other thief instantly began to give us trouble in the same way. But now was my time. Knowing by bitter experience that handcuffs were useless upon Toby, I had come prepared with some yards of thin strong rope ; and while he was pinned by the men, I got it round his wrists about half-a-dozen turns, and as tight as ever I could pull it. Having thus, as I thought, secured his hands, I was stooping down to perform the same office for his busy feet, when, with a sudden wrench, he got his wrists clean out of the cords, kicked me over in the mire, and dashed up into the entry again. With a hoarse shout we were after him, only in time to see him climb with marvellous speed right up the face of the outhouse, on to the roof—using crevices for his fingers and toes that had evidently been carefully prepared long before—and then scramble up the slates, and vanish on the other side. It was now pretty dark, and it took me some moments' searching to find the crevices in the wall ; but before I had put my toe in the first niche, we were startled by a great crash, as of some heavy body "sliddering" down the slates and falling on the other side. Mingled with the fall came the sound of a groan and a string of curses ; and I stopped a moment in my climbing to shout down to the men—

"Round with you to the next close ! I think he has hurt himself ; but don't depend on that. Watch every outlet ; surround it on every side, or he's lost !"

Up on the pinnacle of the roof, I found the incline much

steeper on the other side ; and, having no wish to imitate Toby's swift descent, I got my boots off first, and then crawled down and peered over into a kind of joiner's yard below. I could see the ground pretty clearly, and the various articles strewed about ; but I need hardly say, I could see no Toby. By and by I saw a man's hat and head come peering into the yard ; but it was only one of the policemen, who had arrived just a minute too late. Toby was gone, and the dog Peep had vanished with him, and I was very doubtful if we would see or hear of either for many months to come. I was angry and out of temper, of course, for it was in Toby and his welfare that I took the most affectionate interest ; but there was nothing for it but to lug off the other thief and lock him up, after searching every nook and corner in the place without success.

Poor Clunie—who would play with fireirons, and so had got himself burnt—was carried off to the Infirmary, still insensible ; and there it was very speedily announced to us that his skull had sustained a dangerous fracture, and that his recovery was by no means certain. My interest in Toby was augmented tenfold upon the receipt of this intelligence ; but for nearly a week not a trace of him could be found, high or low. If the earth had swallowed him when he tumbled down off the roof, he could not have been more effectually hidden from sight.

But as I did eventually come upon a trace of him in a strange way, and the circumstances are not without interest, I may here, for the reader's benefit, pick up Toby where he fell and follow him into hiding.

An unfortunate slip of one of Toby's heels on the slates near the top of the roof made his legs shoot out from below him, and sent him, swift as a shot, over the edge of the house into the yard below ; but though the fall would have broken the neck of an ordinary man on the spot, I question whether it would have inflicted the slightest injury upon Toby, had he not chanced to fall on a chopping block, which caught him just below the shoulder, fracturing the collar-bone and breaking two of his ribs. Now, had Toby been wise, when he felt himself hurt, he would simply have lain still and allowed himself to be captured and doctored ; but Toby was a thief, which appellation is only another name for being unwise ; so he sprang to his feet, and "hirpled" in a groaning way out of the yard and away up the close, much more swiftly than would have been deemed possible. He crossed the High Street and slunk

down rapidly on the other side ; but before he reached the head of Leith Wynd, he noticed the dog Peep trotting at his heels. He re-crossed the street, and plunged down into a narrow close leading to some tan-works at the Back Canongate, and there he squirmed himself in at the window of a deserted brick building which had been used as a cabinetmaker's workshop. There was nothing in the place but a quantity of shavings, as he had discovered on a previous visit, when he had thought to lift some valuable tools ; and among these shavings he lay down to rest and groan, with poor Peep cowering at his side, and occasionally licking his fevered temples.

And now I come to notice the redeeming trait in poor Peep's character—his remarkable intelligence and devotion to his brutal master.

Before morning Toby was in a burning fever, and suffering the most fearful tortures from his injured side and a consuming thirst. Peep could do nothing but whine in sympathy, and lick his face and hands as he tossed about ; but in one of his paroxysms of agony Toby cried out—

“ Oh, God ! water—water ! only fetch me a drop of water ! ”

Peep stopped whining at once, and, with business-like alacrity, leaped up on the open window and disappeared. Shortly after, a child was filling a little tin pitcher with water at the Cowgate Port well, when the can was suddenly snatched out of her hand by the handle by a terrible and fierce-looking dog, which instantly dashed off and disappeared down the Back Canongate. Peep was seen, too, by some persons having windows overlooking the cabinet shop bearing a pitcher by the handle in his mouth and leaping up at the open window.

For nearly a week this went on, Peep sometimes fetching water, but oftener making a marauding expedition through the neighbouring streets, snatching “ pieces ” from children's hands and bearing them off in triumph to a sick man who could not eat them, and sometimes even boldly entering a butcher's shop, and bolting with a lump of meat that was never cooked, far less eaten.

But Toby, in spite of Peep's faithful and assiduous attention, got no better. Sometimes he raved in delirium, and was unconscious for hours, and so weak that he could not lift a hand. His pain was all gone now—that, at least, was a relief ; but though he could not know that mortification had set in, he nevertheless had a dim foreboding that all was not right.

“ Ah, Peep ! ” he faintly whispered, “ I'm afraid it's a croaker

with me. I'm goin' to die, after all. You know Father O'Brien—fetch him! fetch him!”

Peep was for a moment undecided as to the meaning of the command, or too much occupied with his own grief to obey, and the dying thief faintly tried him again.

“Don't let me die like a dog, Peep,” he groaned out. “You know Father O'Brien—his reverence, whom we used always to avoid: fetch him! fetch Father O'Brien—quick, quick!”

Peep gave one bark of intelligence, and disappeared like a flash of lightning. What hunting he had in search of the father I cannot tell; but I know that when he did at last come up with him he was all muddy and dirty, and scarcely able to crawl. Father O'Brien noticed the dog, and wondered that it did not, as usual, slink out of his way—a trick that it had copied off its master; but when it followed him up and down several closes in his visitations, and always patiently waited till he reappeared, his surprise increased.

“Where's your wicked, good-for-nothing master?” the good priest asked at last, for he had heard all about Toby's doings, and knew how much he was “wanted.” “Where's Toby, the villain?”

At the mention of the name Peep gave one loud bark of joy leaped right up in the air, and then ran eagerly down the close, and looked anxiously back, as if inviting the priest to follow.

“There's something wrong,” thought the priest. “That dog's almost human—everybody says that; and yet it never would come near me before. It seems to want me to go down there. Peep, ye villain! where's Toby?”

Peep gave other two joyous barks, and then, seeing the priest follow, it trotted on, with its half-tail elevated high in the air, as if proud of the honour of conducting his reverence right down the Cowgate and Back Canongate to the deserted cabinet shop.

Now, it so happened, that just as the queer pair were passing the school at the corner, I was coming down the Pleasance, and though I did not recognise the priest, nor suspect that he was following the dog, I did recognise Peep, and instantly resolved to watch where he went. Both priest and dog turned up the narrow close, and, after a proper interval, I followed. When I came in sight of the cabinet shop, Peep was already through the window, and Father O'Brien was doing his best to follow—a feat by no means trifling, considering his corpulence. Curious to see what was going on without disturbing them, I

got to the other end of the building, and peered through the dirty window. Father O'Brien was on his knees beside a rude bed of shavings, holding up in his arms the white shadow of a man whom I had great difficulty in recognising as Toby, and who was pouring, thick and fast, into his ears the great errors of his life. Instinctively, though no Catholic myself, I uncovered my head, and remained standing thus till the absolution was given, and Toby was gently laid back, and the cross held up before his fast glazing eyes, while poor Peep gave out one long howl of distracted grief.

"Poor Peep!" murmured the dying man, who had given the father a minute account of all his attentions. "Who'll care for thee now?"

These were his last words. His head fell back; and for a moment the good priest looked upwards, with clasped hands, absorbed in prayer; then he straightened the lifeless form, spread his own white handkerchief over the face, and got out by the window as he had entered.

"Ah! Mr M'Govan," he gravely said, recognising me, "it's all over, and Toby will never trouble you more."

I had the body removed in the course of the day, and a rude shell was sent down by the parochial authorities for its decent burial; but poor Peep never quitted its side. There he stuck during the long night, fierce and intractable if interfered with, but quiet and subdued if let alone. Next day the coffin was borne down to the burying-ground by four men from the poor-house. Only one followed it—the chief mourner—poor Peep! He stood by the open grave, whining and watching, with his head turned curiously on one side, the heavy clods of earth as they were tumbled in hiding the coffin from his sight, but when all was over, no threats or entreaties could induce him to quit the spot. There he planted himself; and the curious thing was, that he always appeared to be LISTENING for some one coming up out of the turf. When night came on, he was driven out with a spade; but when the gravedigger appeared again next day, he found Peep back at his post, listening as intently as ever, and looking as if he had occupied the post during the whole night.

In the course of the day the gravedigger, beginning to be touched by the mute devotion of the dog, brought it some food. Peep looked at the food, and up in the face of the giver, and then carried it to the head of the grave, where he laid it down untouched, as if for some one else to eat.

Two days after this, I heard about Peep's grief and devotion,

and went down to the grave to see him ; but I only arrived in time to see the gravedigger making a hole for him in a nettly corner. Poor Peep was dead ! He had been found curled up near the untasted food on Toby's unmarked grave—not asleep, as the man for some hours imagined, but stiff and cold as the thief lying beneath !

In another part of the city a very pretty little monument has been erected to a terrier that was seen for some years hanging about a churchyard ; but there is no monument to poor Peep. No : he was too ugly—and sharp in the teeth—and devoted ; but then, of course, both he and his master were thieves, and dark oblivion seems to be the fate of all who sink into crime.

A MAN-COQUETTE.

THE above is a queer title, and may make some of my readers open their eyes. We are all familiar with the word "flirt," but it generally conveys the idea of a young and pretty girl who can sport with the feelings of the opposite sex in the most heartless manner, till she herself gets bitten, and then suffers more than she ever inflicted on man. Coquette has the same meaning. Somehow, we never think of applying the word to men; yet the result of my experience is, that male coquettes or flirts are quite as plentiful as female, if not more so. Many a poor girl—God help her!—can echo the truth of my words. Many a life has been clouded, many a grave has been filled, many a happy home darkened, by these heartless, unpunishable monsters. The sin does not seem so great—only to smile on a girl, treat her to much flattery and a few kind attentions, get her to love you, and then throw her off, have a good laugh at her, and try the same with another—that is all; yet it is a sin that blights—a sin that leaves a long train of darkness and suffering in its wake.

I don't know very well how to hold the scales in the following case; indeed, it will be seen that there was sin on both sides, and on both sides, directly or indirectly, was that sin heavily punished.

I was out at a small Station in a village about a mile and a-half from the outskirts of Edinburgh, looking over the books in search of an important piece of evidence, when my business was suddenly put a stop to by the entrance of a young man in a state of great excitement.

"Where's Fairlie?" he demanded, naming the local superintendent.

"Ben the house, I believe, at his tea," I answered, laying down my pen, and shoving back my seat. "Anything serious the matter?"

"Serious!" he echoed, as Fairlie made his appearance munching at his disturbed meal—"I should say there is

Andrew Chisholm's got his twa een burned oot o' his heid; he'll never see mair in this world—so the doctor says. We took him there first, an' he's there now—sufferin' maist awfu' ”

“Hoot, toot!” coolly returned the policeman, drawing on his boots; “it canna be sae bad as a' that, now.”

“Ay, but it is, an' you're to come quick,” was the excited rejoinder. “Ye'll no guess, now, wha's dune it?”

“Dune it!” cried the policeman, looking up in horror, with one boot on. “Was it no an accident?”

“No; Jeanie Comrie did it a'. She got him to meet her doon at the Cross Road, and then threw some burning stuff oot o' a bottle in his een. It didna gang richt in at first; but she was that determined that she grippit him by the hair and rubbed it in wi' her hands. Her richt hand's a' burnt wi' daein' it.”

“Maist awfu'!” echoed the policeman. “Lord help us a'! what's the world comin' tae?”

“What was her object in committing such a dreadful out rage?” I asked.

“That's mair than onybody can tell. He doesna ken himsel'.”

“Strange! Was there no love affair between them?—no jilting, or jealousy, or anything?”

“Nane, nane. He never went wi' her in his life, that I ken o'; and he says the same himsel'. He came roarin' up the lane, haudin' his een, in the awfulest agony, an' some o' us that heard him took him roond to the doctor's. He wants ye tae see after the lassie Comrie, though, afore she gets off; for she must have come oot frae Edinburgh for nae other purpose than to blind him.”

The policeman looked to me for advice.

“You'd better go and get the girl, while I go with the young man and see this Chisholm who has been injured,” was my hasty decision; and it was at once acted upon. We turned out into the darkness, and parted—he going one way, and I following my guide a good way out on the other side of the road to the house of the only medical man about the place.

I found Chisholm writhing and groaning in great agony, with his eyes and the greater part of his face covered with bandages, and his mouth filled with one long stream of curses on the head of the author of his misery. At last it was made known to him that some one connected with the police

stood before him, and then he eagerly turned his bandaged face towards me and inquired—

“Have you got her?” Have you got the fiend that did it?”

“We have not; but I don’t think she will be long at large. Fairlie is gone to arrest her now. In the meantime I wish to ask you a few questions, and for this purpose would be obliged if every one else would retire.” This I said without looking at any one in particular; but they all—not even excepting the medical man—had the good sense to take the hint, and in a moment we were alone.

“Now,” I said, “if you hope for a conviction, you must be free and unreserved with every particular. Tell me, in the first place, what was her reason for committing the crime.”

“I don’t know. How should I?”

There was a dogged hesitancy about the tone that roused my suspicions, and set me a-thinking. He had fidgeted uneasily at the proposal to be questioned alone, and even demurred aloud; but to that I could give no heed. Now I began to have an inkling of the cause.

“Did you ever injure her in any way?” I demanded, with a sharpness that startled him.

“No.”

There’s a great deal in the way a word is said, even though it should have only two letters. This answer, sullenly given, did not convey the idea of a negative: it simply said, “Why do you pry at me for details? I will tell nothing.”

“It is not likely,” I suggested, “that she would do it, and burn herself in doing it, for nothing. Think again. You must have offended her in some way?”

Another sullen, groaning pause, and then, with an oath, he cried—

“She’s mad! she must be mad!”

“Why?”

I was sharp with my question, but he could find no reply. All he said was—

“How could I injure her, when she has been years in service in Edinburgh, and I all my lifetime out here?”

“I don’t know. Are not her friends out here?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you might have injured them.”

He cowered and made no reply.

“Is it not so?” I asked, determined to get something out of him.

"I don't know—I never injured anybody."

"Nay, that's not true, or else you are very unlike most people."

"Ay, I daresay you'll believe all the lies she tells you," he said, with a show of bitterness. "Well, that won't save her, that's one good thing; for it won't give me back my sight."

"I see you are in no mood to be communicative, and I have no time to waste," I said, rising to go. "But, mark me, I *know* there has been an injury; and I would stake a good deal that I trace that injury to you. I don't mean to defend this cruel woman—quite the reverse."

I left him, there and then, and on the way back to the village was met by a message from the superintendent, who informed me gleefully that "the woman was caught." The real fact was, that we had scarcely left the Station when Jane Comrie, with her right hand bound up in a handkerchief, walked in and asked for Fairlie. Being informed of his absence, she calmly took a seat, and remained there without moving a muscle till he was recalled.

I gazed curiously and searchingly into her face as I entered and took my place at the desk, but I did not make much of it. It was a good-looking face, with a flashing, dangerous eye, and two cheeks burning red with suppressed excitement and pain combined; but it was a face that told no tales—a face rigid and stony with the power of the stern will beneath. But as soon as I was ready, her words came out as exact and clear as if they had been printed in a book.

"I want to give myself up for blinding Andrew Chisholm. I did it with vitriol, which I bought in three shops in Edinburgh, and then put in a wide-mouthed bottle, so that it would come out easy. I meant to blind him—to make him that he could never look upon woman or man again."

I stopped her there, or rather I was so horrified that my pen refused to move; and, after giving her the usual warning, I said—

"What on earth, woman, prompted you to such a brutal outrage?"

There was a change in her face now. It was like a quick flush, and then a sudden paling, accompanied by a choking and catching for breath which for some moments effectually prevented a reply. When the fit was over, she seemed as if about to reveal all; but some thought checked her, and she said, in her former tones—

"It matters not now, I feel in my heart that I have done right."

"Woman," I sternly replied, "I don't know what your wrongs may be, but this I do know—you have done a cruel, savage wrong. To blind a man, in my way of thinking, is worse than taking his life. I hope you may live to repent of it."

I said the words in some warmth and indignation, but I had no idea they would sink so deeply. But so it was ; for, years after, she remembered them and repeated them to me, word for word. Whether she did live to repent of it or no, I shall show before I am done, for my story, in its ups and downs, is quite as queer as the title.

The self-accused woman opened her eyes a little at my indignant speech, but she answered not a word. It was different with my next question—it seemed to probe her to the quick in an instant.

"The man says he knows nothing that he has done to offend you, or cause you to act thus?"

The blood rushed into her face, and her eyes appeared positively on fire as she started forward and cried out—

"Then he is a liar!"

"Gently, gently," I interposed, waving her back with the pen in my hand. "It is possible he may have injured you and yet be unconscious of it."

"It is not possible!" was the fierce retort. "I told him all he had done before I blinded him. I made sure of that."

"And what had he done, may I ask?"

"Killed her!—killed my foster-sister, that was dearer to me than a hundred real sisters put together! Jessie Somerville was buried on Tuesday; and after they were all gone from the grave, I stole in and there swore that she should be his last victim."

"Victim! killed her!" I echoed, in the most open-mouthed astonishment. "Do you mean to say that Chisholm is a murderer?"

"Yes, a murderer; but not such as you or the law can lay hands on. Do you know what a man-coquette is?"

"Certainly; I've heard of such heartless wretches."

"Ah! heartless wretches—you've struck the words exactly!" fiercely continued the girl. "He's one—or has been one—of the worst. I don't think you are altogether destitute of feeling, though you *are* one of the police. Listen to my story, and then say if I have done so very wrong;" and in the same

impassioned way she gave me the details, which I have condensed as follows :—

Jeanie Comrie and Jessie Somerville were not related in any way ; but, having been nursed and suckled together, they grew up with something very like that close-drawn love between them which is so often noticeable in born twins. But Jeanie grew up strong, handsome, and masculine ; while Jessie, the adopted orphan, grew up small, delicate, and bird-like. Jessie was full of love and impulsive affection—brimming over with it, and could no more help showing it than the sun could help shining or giving out warmth ; but Jeanie shut hers up, in a kind of man's fashion, in her breast, and only gave herself up to watching, with an eagle eye, the welfare of her pretty little darling. Indeed, even when they were quite girls, it was remarked that Jeanie acted more like a mother, or a strong big brother, than a foster-sister. Thus, when they both became women, Jeanie would not for a moment hear of the delicate, pretty creature going to work. No ; it was merely a choice between two. One was needed at home : and who was more fit to face the buffets of the world, and the hard work demanded for money, than she herself ? Jeanie bared her great strong arm before the little family council, and then held up Jessie's tiny hand, and bravely asked which was cut out by Providence for service ? Of course, there could be but one answer to that ; and love and devotion carried the day.

Jeanie took a place in Edinburgh—no inducements in money could persuade her to go further—and trudged out regularly every Sunday to see her little birdie, and let her nestle in her arms, and tell her all her pleasures and troubles. But one Sunday Jessie had something to tell which she couldn't get out, let her try as she might ; and as no endearments on the part of Jeanie were more successful in drawing it out, after much blushing and shrinking, she had to be content with Jessie's promise to let her "know all next Sunday."

The next Sunday came, and with it Jessie's gently breathed heart confession ; but Jeanie's face became like stone when she mentioned the name of Andrew Chisholm. Jeanie had never been in love herself, but she knew this man and his reputation, and the mischief he had already done in his thoughtless way ; and when she thought of the same agony coming to her darling birdie, she was chilled to the heart.

"You do not say anything," said Jessie, timidly looking up

through the dim twilight, as they sat together after church hours. "You are not—not angry?"

"Angry! no," answered Jeanie, forcing a smile, and giving her a kiss. "But I hope he will make you happy."

"Happy! I am happy!" unsuspiciously returned Jessie, in an impulsive burst. "And he is so good and handsome, and loves me so much—and his eyes! when they look down into mine I just think I'm in heaven!"

Jeanie sighed, and the tears crept into her eyes, and she strained Jessie closer to her breast, as if that would have saved the ethereal young girl from the evil she saw looming in the future; but Jessie was so full of her own sweet joy, that she saw and felt nothing of her foster-sister's alarm. But about an hour after, when Jeanie turned down from the house to take her solitary walk into Edinburgh, she met the man she so much dreaded coming towards the house, and, though loathing him in her heart, and guessing his errand, for the first time she felt inclined to address him, and do all in her power to earn his good-will.

"What are you doing here?" she asked him, rather bluntly, and watching his handsome face keenly through the darkness, after a few trivial questions and answers. "I wish I could ask him what he means to do!" she added to herself. "But, though it might save her a world of after pain, Jessie would never forgive me."

"Oh! nothing," was the careless and smiling reply. "I half engaged to take your Jessie out for a walk—that's all."

"From my soul, I believe you," thought Jeanie, with her hands clenched instinctively under her shawl. "A walk—that's all. My wee birdie's heart-broken—that's all." Then as calmly as she could force herself to speak, she added, "Are you as great a flirt among the girls as ever?"

"A flirt? Oh! that's all nonsense that the people talk," he smilingly replied, evidently taking the implication as a compliment. "It's all stuff: none of the lassies will look at me."

Jeanie read the shallow artifice, and the shallow, vain man that put it forth, through and through; and then said, in a quiet, still way that startled him—

"I had a reason for asking."

"Ha, ha, ha! You had indeed!" delightedly rejoined the man-coquette; "and what was the reason?"

"Because I don't want you to flirt with our Jessie," was the steady reply

"How? What do you mean? Do you want me not to go near her?" he asked, drawing on a doleful look.

"No, not at all," she answered, trying to look frank and smile; "you may go near her as often as you like, and take walks, too, if my father allows it; but don't *flirt* with her. Don't trifle with her feelings. Let every word you say to her be true and sacred, as if you uttered it before the bar of God."

"Ha, ha, ha! Lord! but you would make a capital preacher, Jeanie," cried the empty-headed fool; "I never thought you had so much of that in you."

She turned away with a sickening pang. This was the man upon whose flippant words and pretty face depended the whole happiness of her life's treasure: it was too much for her, and she almost groaned aloud.

"Never mind what's in me," she darkly returned, as soon as she could speak. "Don't seek to discover, either—it might be dangerous."

"Dangerous!" he echoed, in astonishment. "How?"

"I don't know," she answered in a fevered way; "I don't know what might be in me if I were sorely tried. But I feel it—power, strength, will—here," and her hand went down with a clench on her broad breast.

"Upon my word, I don't understand you," said the man-coquette, with a sickly smile, but shrinking a little.

"Nor I you," was the quick retort. "But we will by and by. Remember, I've warned you in good time. It's better to break a finger than a heart—better to lose a sleeve than a whole gown. If there's a truthful spot in your heart, bring it to the surface now, for you will have need of it."

She said no more, but was off with a whisk, tearing over the dark rough road with great, firm strides that might have shamed a man, and leaving him standing speechless, but with just the faintest dawning of fear in his craven heart.

"I don't like that woman," he said to himself at last. "I think they've turned her head in at Edinburgh there. Yes, she must be mad;" and with this comfortable reflection, he pursued his way to the house, where the warm and tender reception of the fairy-like Jessie did much to soothe his ruffled spirits.

One would think, though, that after such a warning, he would, if not fairly frightened away, have been more cautious with his looks and words. But no; he was a practised hand, and had gone over the same ground repeatedly before. As Jessie's love

was deep and overwhelming, so was her sensitive modesty great; and as yet he was not quite sure of his prey—he did not yet know that she loved him deeply enough to feel great sorrow if he cast her off. Can it be believed—does it not seem incredible—that a man should apply himself to such a silly, heartless task? It may be believed, for I speak the truth, not of one alone, but of hundreds.

Jeanie could not rest at her work, and by Tuesday had so wrought herself up in alarm, that she rose an hour earlier and wrote a long letter of warning out to Jessie.

Jessie read it in wonder. She could not understand how her dear foster-sister could be so prejudiced, pitied her not a little, and, moth-like, continued to flutter round the flame that was to consume her. For two or three weeks Jeanie noticed her happiness still on the increase, and had almost begun to hope that she had judged the man harshly, when there came a sudden blank. The haggard look on Jessie's face struck a sudden alarm to Jeanie's heart the moment she reached the house one Sunday forenoon; and there was no church for her that day. Her father went, but the two girls being left alone, it was not long till Jessie was sobbing hysterically on the strong loving breast of her foster-sister.

"He has not come near me for more than a week, and—and—I heard that he was going with another girl!" sobbed the poor shrinking Jessie. "Oh, Jeanie! if I should lose him now it would kill me!"

Jeanie could have said, woman-like, "I told you so—I knew it from the first," but she didn't. No; she kissed the tears away, and resolutely tried to push back those in her own eyes, as she whispered—

"Hush, dearie! you are perhaps too good and pure for him. But do not distress yourself; you shall soon know what he means to do, for I shall go to him and demand to know."

"Jeanie, Jeanie!" cried the timid sufferer, starting up before her like a white ghost; "oh! you would not! Never, never! I would not have it for worlds. Promise me now—do, like a dear girl!—never to allude to it in any way to him."

"Well, well—I promise," said Jeanie, more to drive away the terrible, scared look from the face before her than from any idea of what the words meant.

"If he loves me, he will come again," reasoned Jessie, in a half-hopeful strain, "for we never quarrelled. The only thing that may have offended him was when he asked me, in a light

way, if I would like to be his wife. The words so took my breath away, that I couldn't speak for some time; but at last I stammered out, "Yes, in a year or two." Then he laughed outright, and said I was a great fool, with a lot of other playful words like that, and he never came back again. I think I haven't been quite modest enough in my answer—eh?"

"Modest enough!" echoed Jeanie, drawing her closer. "Oh, the monster! the heartless brute! that could treat *you* thus. He doesn't deserve the name of a man."

"Oh! but he does," gently interposed Jessie. "You don't know how kind and good he seemed to me. But I don't care what he is—though he is the worst in the world,—I love him, and that makes all the difference."

"It does indeed," sighed Jeanie, bitterly; and then an awkward silence fell on the pair, as if there was to be a kind of estrangement between them.

But it was only for a while. They knew each other's hearts too well, and loved each other too deeply and devotedly, to allow a mere difference of opinion to separate them; and having now unburthened her griefs, Jessie appeared to brighten hopefully as the day advanced. That same night Jeanie, in turning in towards Edinburgh from the village, learned Chisholm's intentions without asking, for she met the pretty-faced villain with another girl hanging on his arm; and he, as if conscious of guilt, did not dare to meet her, but slunk suddenly off the pathway, right across the muddy roadway, and got past her thus, with averted eyes.

"Ah, so! I knew we would understand each other by-and-by," she muttered, standing still and looking after him. "My wee birdie is to droop, and droop—perhaps die; and you are to go on, and on, and on, and no one is to say nay? We'll see, we'll see! I'm strong—very strong at times; and I may spoil your beauty and fine eyes some day, if the fit only comes on. Wait!"

Jeanie said nothing to Jessie about the encounter—she would not have augmented her grief by one feather's weight; but Jessie had quite enough evidence of the kind brought under her own notice to make her cry her eyes red and inflamed all night long, and make her sink and pine away till she was a mere walking shadow. An unaccountable dimness in her eyesight, which came shortly after a slight chill in the morning, at last alarmed her adopted father, and he took her to the resident medical man, who at once pronounced the trouble to be

cataract of the eye in a mild form, and dismissed them with a lotion of some kind, and a few commonplace words about keeping cheerful and avoiding cold. But the eyes got dimmer and dimmer; and upon Jeanie's arrival on the following Sunday, she peremptorily insisted on Jessie being taken in to an Edinburgh professor next day. This was done, and the great man's decision was, that the cataract would have to be removed by an operation which at present the patient was hardly robust enough to bear.

And so they returned home with a heavy load on their hearts, but with Jessie certainly the most cheerful of the three, and even trying to smile as she said she would make haste to get strong as soon as possible, so that the thing might be done, and she should see their dear faces again. But Jeanie, when she looked down on the white, emaciated face, only turned away and covered her eyes with the corner of her shawl, and then cried, in a quiet way, as if she would never have stopped.

Days and weeks passed away, but Jessie got weaker and weaker, till at last she was hardly ever out of bed; and Jeanie had to get away whole days at a time from her place in Edinburgh to keep the house in order for her father, and soothe Jessie with her presence. The doctor came regularly, and without hesitation pronounced the disease consumption. Consumption? Well, I daresay, medically speaking, he was right; but I would give it another name. Strangely enough, during all this time of sickness, Jessie had never once pronounced Chisholm's name, nor in any way alluded to him. But one Sunday, when the father was at church, Jeanie heard herself called hurriedly. Jessie, whom she had fancied asleep, had started up in bed, with her stony eyes turned eagerly towards the fireplace.

"Hist! Jeanie, dear! are you there?" she eagerly whispered.

"Here, dearie—here," was the quick answer.

"That's his step, and his voice!" cried the trembling sick girl. "Run to the window—quick—and tell me how he looks, or if he is coming here!"

Jeanie obeyed; and there, sure enough, she saw Chisholm walking leisurely and laughingly past the house, with a girl leaning on his arm. Jeanie stared at him with a face of marble; but she could find no voice to say anything to Jessie.

"He is going away—I hear him going away," sadly whispered the blind girl. "Jeanie, dear, tell me, did he look towards the house?"

A burst of sobs, and a wild clinging in Jeanie's strong arms, were the only answer.

"Ah, you are afraid to answer—afraid to pain me," sighed Jessie, running her soft fingers tenderly over Jeanie's loved features. "But, Jeanie—now don't shrink and shudder—there was another step with his : it was a woman's, and it went with his. Was she—was she—like a sweetheart?"

"Don't ask me, Jessie—don't, if you love me !" burst in Jeanie at last.

"Ah ! I knew she was a sweetheart," sighed Jessie. "I hope she will make a good wife ; I hope she will be kind to him, and never give him a cross word. He deserves a good wife, though everybody does speak against him. I wasn't good enough, or strong enough, or pretty enough—I didn't deserve to be his wife. Poor fellow ! it's as well he gave me up, for how he would have suffered to see me sinking thus ! Don't cry, Jeanie, for you must have guessed the truth long ago—I am never to see you again. There now, don't—don't, or your eyes will turn dim like mine. No, Jeanie, I will never see you again, for my strength will never come back, and the operation will never be made."

She was not done speaking, though it was more than she had said for weeks ; but a ghastly spasm crossed her face as she got the last word out, and drew a scream of alarm from the strong girl who had her in her arms. Jeanie flew for the medicine ; but before she got back to the bedside, the blood was oozing from between the lips of the doomed girl, and her hands working convulsively in the air. Jeanie raised her in her arms, wiped everything from the lips, prayed aloud as she had never prayed before, and then bent her ear to catch what the moving lips were saying.

"Tell him—tell him—I'm gone to heaven !" were Jessie's last words, and half-an-hour after uttering them she was calm and smiling, but her heart was stilled for ever.

Jeanie allowed herself no rest. She carried the dear form in her own arms into the room, dressed it as tenderly and lovingly as ever mother did child, drew a white counterpane over it, put down the blinds, and then went back to the kitchen, took up her Bible, and tried to read or pray—anything to keep up thought.

Her father's step took her quick to the door. He noticed nothing, but said, anxiously—

"Jessie—is she any better?"

"Come in, father," said Jeanie, tenderly, but with a strange calmness;—"come in, for I am all you have now. Jessie is dead."

Jeanie waited till after the funeral, and then went back to her place in Edinburgh for a few days before leaving it to come home finally. She had sworn over Jessie's grave that this should be Chisholm's last victim; but, after thinking of the means, she had still enough of good training in her to make it a hard struggle to actually come to the deed. At last, just as she was leaving the town, in a half-maddened state, she got the vitriol. Sending for Chisholm, and then determinedly blinding him, were easy after that; and thus ended her story. But mine is not finished yet, for perhaps the most curious part of it is to come.

Jeanie was duly tried; but being defended by an able lawyer, who knew well how to make the most of the points I have brought out, she got off with eighteen months' imprisonment.

But here comes the strange thing. When she had been about a year in prison, she was attacked by the same symptoms as Jessie, and for nearly three months was in hospital, almost totally blind. It was during this period of temporary darkness, as she afterwards confessed to me, that she first recalled my words—"I hope you may live to repent it;" and by the time she again saw the light, she was thoroughly subdued, and the first use she made of her eyesight was to write a long letter—beautiful and touching in the extreme—to Chisholm, imploring his forgiveness, and offering to do anything in her power to alleviate his affliction. Now, it happened that though Chisholm had recovered the use of one eye, his sight was so far injured as to forbid the prosecution of his ordinary calling; and as soon as Jeanie was released, he thankfully accepted her offer to take the post of gatekeeper in a factory at the outskirts of Edinburgh, in which her own father now held a post of trust. In this position of affairs, it came about that Chisholm and Jeanie often met, and always as friends. It is said that pity is closely akin to love; but whether that is true or not, Jeanie's sympathy so far merged into a warmer feeling, that when at last the changed man ventured to ask her hand in marriage in presence of her father, she did not refuse, but actually went down on her knees, and said that her whole life would be devoted to making him happy.

And so they were married, and so I wish my story could end; but, if I am to be truthful, it cannot. Two years after

her marriage, the dimness in Jeanie's eyes returned ; and this time, instead of going to a properly qualified medical man, she was induced to consult a quack oculist, who professed to cure cataract without cutting. The consequence was that her sight was permanently injured ; and while the sight of her husband's one eye seemed to get clearer, she gradually receded into darkness, and finally became totally blind. Her husband's devotion, patience, and cheerfulness at last seemed to reconcile her to her fate ; and now that ten years of married life have passed over their heads, and a blithesome family is springing up around them, considering the distressing circumstances, I daresay there is not a more agreeable or happy couple in Edinburgh.

BILLY AND ME.

I HAVE already shown that a kind action can spring up and bear fruit in the oddest and most unexpected manner, and I will now give another instance. With a few alterations, and a denouement a little more grand and striking, the following incident could be made a very pretty story. But I have to deal with real life in these scribbles, so I give it simple and unadorned. At the same time, it will be another instance of how an apparent trifle sometimes leads to the ferreting out of a criminal. In this busy, hurrying world of ours, we are too apt to overlook trifles ; and yet it is curious, in looking back, how vividly the trifles stand out. A bright roguish look out of the corner of a child's eye, or an imperfectly lisped word, often haunt a poor mother's heart with a kind of sweet sorrow, after the little mound which covered its dust has ceased to exist. And that is only one instance out of thousands. Every one may recall them. A sunny smile, a kind cheery word, or a hearty pull out of a difficulty, though perhaps given without thought or trouble, come floating down to us through the mist of years as our sweetest and most tender recollections, when mighty actions and deeds are buried and forgotten.

"Miser Gilpie, the broker, near the foot of the Pleasance, has been found dead in his shop. The place appears to have been broken into before or after his death ; so you had better go down along with the medical inspector before the body is moved, and see what you can make out of it."

This news, and the order accompanying it, was the first thing that greeted me one cold sleety morning in December when I made my appearance at the Office.

Miser Gilpie was a nickname for the most ugly, snarling, and ungracious piece of humanity I ever met. He lived alone in a room at the back of his shop, and, as far as I could discover, was without a single relative or friend in the world. Worse : he appeared to be without a single good quality. He was not rich either, though, of course, popular report assigned

to him fabulous wealth; had long been on the regular poor-roll; and, from his avarice and greedy repulsive manner, so effectually frightened people, that he hardly ever turned over a penny in his shop. Indeed, for long we wrongfully suspected him of being a sly resetter. I had met him often before, in his shop and elsewhere—sometimes before daybreak, or far into the night, poking about dust-heaps for the cinders, bones, and rags, which he utilised in his own way,—and I never saw his weasined, hawkish face, but I turned away with a shudder. This was the man who, after all his grubbing, starving, and horrible ideas of life and humanity, had gone the way of all men, and whom we were now on our way to see.

Suspicious as his death looked, it appeared to have caused neither excitement nor concern in the neighbourhood; for, with the exception of a few boys about the door, doubtless attracted by the sight of a policeman guarding it, there was no crowd.

The body lay face upwards on the floor of the back room, just as it had been found. A hideous snarl appeared to mantle the face, as if his last idea had been to growl and spit at mankind; and tightly clenched in both hands was a heavy piece of wood, like two flat boards nailed together, which I at first thought he had been using as a weapon against the burglars, when death had stricken him down. The bit of wood, or singular weapon, we took from his grasp and tossed aside, without thought or examination, though I had afterwards occasion to look at it closely enough.

There was abundant evidence of a desperate struggle having taken place; but after a short examination the Inspector decided, beyond a doubt, that the cause of death was apoplexy, perhaps brought on or accelerated by the terror or excitement of the midnight intrusion. That such an intrusion had taken place I had not the slightest doubt, though it appeared to me that the burglars had been suddenly scared away without getting any great search made for valuables. The window and shutter of the room had been ingeniously opened from a yard behind, and left so; but beyond the things knocked about in the struggle, nothing appeared to have been disturbed or taken away. A peculiar appearance about the mouth struck us both; and, after a close examination and some trouble, we succeeded in getting the teeth open, and then took out a round bit of velvet and cloth, bound at the edge with silk braid.

“The lappel of somebody’s coat has suffered,” remarked the

doctor, as he placed the scrap in my hands. "You'd better have a look at the attire of some of your bairns."

I promised to attend to the hint, carefully put away the scrap, and was then called to the front shop to attend to a queer little pair who, it seemed, would take no denial, but would "see Mr Gilpie."

I looked about, and at last discovered two little heads just peeping above the edge of the counter. I soon decided, by the dim light from the half-opened door, nearly blocked by the figure of the policeman in charge, that the heads belonged to a girl and boy of at most seven and six years. They were poorly clad, but the faces were so unlike anything I expected in such a locality and at such a time, that I stared at them in mute amazement. The girl attracted me most, and it gradually dawned on me that she had the most beautiful and winning little face that I ever beheld on a child.

"If you please, sir, it's only Billy and me," she began, in a voice and tone that thrilled me through like a sort of fairy music.

Her little curtsy seemed to imply that I knew and understood everything ; but didn't, so I came down off my stilts and got confidential.

"Ay, and so that's Billy, is it ?" I said, stroking the bright-eyed wee man on the head. "Seems a nice little chap."

"Seems!" she cried. "He is. He's my brave little brother, and I love him!" and she gave him a cuddle that confirmed her words.

I had a faint wonder as to what could bring such an odd pair there, but I did not allow the feeling to appear.

"And your name is—?"

"Susie—Susie Howe," she answered, with a simple sweetness that made me feel like a great monster for knowing it already.

"Ah, Susie, of course ; how foolish of me not to know," I stammered, guiltily. "And you wanted to see Mr Gilpie, did you ?"

"Oh, yes ! He told us to come, you know," she quickly returned, with a bright look which instantly told me how little she suspected the awful truth. "He's a strange man, and I was terribly afraid of him at first ; but he does not seem quite so ugly now, and I like him pretty well."

"Are you a relation of Mr Gilpie's ?" I gravely asked.

"Oh, no ! Billy and me's got no friends, nor nobody to look after us in the whole world now. Mother's dead, you know ;"

and such a rush of tears blinded her eyes, that I felt my own grow moist in sympathy. Billy, after two or three gulps, shoved his knuckles into his eyes and burst out crying too. Susie's eyes dried in an instant.

"Oh, but he's a brave little brother, and he never cries now!" she said, cuddling him round the neck, and kissing his eyes dry. "Oh, no, he wouldn't cry for anything, for I'm his mother now." The little artifice succeeded perfectly, and Billy forgot his griefs and brightened again. Curious to learn how such a pair came to be so utterly forlorn, and to have any connection with a man like Miser Gilpie, I took the two home with me to my wife, and gradually drew out of Susie the following simple details, which I shall piece together in my own way:—

Her mother, Mrs Howe, a refined and well-educated woman, had been a widow for some years. Their home had been in Glasgow, and Mrs Howe, being of a spirited and independent nature, had struggled hard with poverty without once letting their condition be known to any of their acquaintances. At last she found that the struggle had been a vain one, and that by selling all, she would barely clear her rent and other liabilities. This she did without a murmur, and then resolved to quit at once the scene of her troubles and humiliation. Though a delicate woman, with only a few shillings in her pocket, she started, with Susie and Billy, to walk from Glasgow to Edinburgh. The weather was stormy and severe, and the snow lay deep on the ground. Wet feet, and the unwonted exposure and exertion, soon prostrated Mrs Howe; and at last, in a little town about seven miles from Edinburgh, the bitter conviction was forced upon her, that she was destined never to reach that city. With her last breath she enjoined Susie not to allow them to take her and Billy to the poor-house, but to walk on and try to find out an old acquaintance of her own, whose address in Edinburgh she left with them. That night Susie and Billy were orphans; and then, with her perceptions sharpened by her mother's last words, Susie overheard some remark about the poor-house, and the advisability of placing them in it. The moment she saw her mother hidden in the icy ground, she took Billy aside, and confided to him the alarming state of affairs. In spite of her efforts, she broke down; and there, hidden by a gap in the hedge, with the dull wintry sky overhead, these two children, locked in each other's arms, sobbed and cried as if their little hearts would break.

"Never—never—mind, Billy," said Susie at last, through her sobs, as she struggled hard to force back the tears that would flow. "I—I'm—to be your mother now. Mother said so, you know. We're very lonely now—at least, I mean, we think we're lonely; but God is looking down at us through the clouds, and He's so sorry for us. But He'll be angry at us if we cry very much."

"But you're crying too," said Billy, in reply.

"Yes; so I am—a little—not very much. Oh! if mother would only come back, how I would kiss her, and cuddle her, and stroke her hair!" and then another burst of sobbing shook them both.

"And we must leave her behind," said Susie at last, "or they will take us and put us in the poor-house, and it has great thick walls, just like a prison."

"Oh! I wouldn't like that," said Billy. "I would rather go into the deep hole with mother."

"Come, I think they're quite out of sight now; let us creep back, and say a little prayer on the grave," suggested Susie. "God will be sure to hear us there, and mother will look down at us from among the bright angels, and make us so happy that we will forget to cry. There, don't cry, Billy, like a wee brave man, and I will try not to cry too," and she led him by the hand back into the snow-covered churchyard.

They knelt down on the new-made mound and clasped their little blue hands, and then Susie said the little prayer aloud, with many interruptions to cry and wipe Billy's eyes. She asked God to look down on them and make them forget to cry, and not feel lonely, and feel as happy as if their mother were still beside them to kiss them and cuddle them in her bosom. Here Susie's voice got choked; she shook all over, and then, with a burst of grief, she threw herself flat on the frozen turf, and cried and sobbed, so that Billy in turn had to raise her and try to comfort her. Then she found heart again to pray that God would protect them on the long dark road, and in the great city they were going to, and help her to be a kind, true little mother. Then Billy said "Amen," and they both kissed the cold turf, and at last dragged themselves away.

The gravedigger had watched them from the tool-house close by, and as they passed he came out and took them up and kissed them both; and as he did so they noticed that his furrowed cheeks were all over wet, as if he had been crying too. Then he gave them a sixpence, and bade them good-bye in a

broken, quivery voice, and then turned away quick to see after something at the other end of the churchyard.

"How good of him!" said Susie, with something like sun shine coming through her tears. "What a dear, kind old man, though he is poor! You see how quick God has answered our prayer. A sixpence will go a long way, Billy, for I won't need anything to eat. I feel as if I would never eat again;" and fresh tears came crowding into her eyes.

"And I feel the same," said Billy; and then, with one lingering look at the churchyard, they left it and the village far behind.

The road was very rough, and terribly lonesome, and it grew rapidly dark; but still the two little mites of humanity trudged on, with the constant dread of pursuers, who would catch them and place them within the strong dark walls of the poor-house they had pictured. But nobody took notice of the two insignificant waifs; and Susie made it all up in the lonely places with Billy, how they were never to cry but when they were by themselves, in case people should ask questions, and try to send them back. Sometimes, when they were sure no one was near, they would sit down on a stone and wreath their arms tight round each other, and cry and choke with grief; but generally Susie managed to keep up a running talk about the fairy wonders Billy would see when they got to the great city—the palaces, the castles, and grand shops and houses, and dolls with moving eyes, and jumping-jacks, and oranges, and, oh! thousands of beautiful things!

They stopped after dark by the way and bought a penny-worth of milk and two biscuits for their supper; but when Susie tendered the sixpence in payment, the woman seemed to notice the two little white faces, all tear-stained, for the first time, and came round from behind the counter, and, after one or two questions, put her arms round them and hugged them to her breast in a way that made them both burst out crying again. She would not take anything off the sixpence either; but, on the contrary, added another sixpence to it, and begged them to stay that night and sleep with her. But Susie was afraid of pursuers, and was so firm in her refusal that the woman was reluctantly forced to let them go. Further on, they managed to creep into a barn and fall asleep; but this cost them their two sixpences, for Susie's hand relaxed in her sleep, and they were lost among the straw. By daybreak they were out again; and then—oh, joyous sight!—there on the horizon was stretched the outline of the city they wished to reach.

But Susie's memory was good, and though she had lost the money, she had still the address of her mother's old acquaintance ; and on getting into the city, her first inquiries were for it. But a bitter disappointment awaited them. They found the place, and the very house, but it was empty, and being, with its neighbours, dismantled to make way for further improvements, and the tenant was gone no one knew whither.

After this crushing blow, the two had to retire into a dark stair to relieve their little hearts ; and then, when they had composed themselves, they wandered aimlessly through the city, till at last Billy complained of hunger. This dreaded climax Susie had put off and put off by diverting his mind to other things ; but at last the words would come out with a burst which admitted of no further parleying. At this juncture she remembered that a locket containing a portrait of her mother was suspended by a slender chain from her neck under her clothes ; and after an inquiry at one of the passers-by, she found herself hunting for a suitable jeweller's or broker's shop wherein to dispose of it. She could read fluently, and as they had wandered down by Drummond Street to the Pleasance, she soon made out the sign of John Gilpie, licensed broker, and at once entered the shop and opened up her business.

The hideous face of the miser frightened her, as it had often frightened those of older growth ; but the thought of Billy nerved her on, and she managed to make her shaking hands under the locket, and placed it in his hands with the words—

“ If you please, sir, will you buy that ? ”

“ Can't buy it from you—not allowed to buy from children,” he snarled, with a look that curdled her blood. “ Send your mother.”

“ My mother—my mother—oh, my mother ! ” was all she got out ; and then a scalding rush of tears hid the ugly monster from her sight.

“ Can't have you crying here. Leave my shop ! ” he growled.

“ I will—oh, yes ! I will ; but please give me the locket.”

“ Ah ! I forgot—there ; no—now that I think of it, though I can't buy it, you can give it to me, and then I can give you a present of some money. Do you see ? ”

Susie brightened a little.

“ Oh ! that will be just the same as buying it,” she exclaimed, with guileless simplicity.

“ No, it won't ; don't dare to say that to me ! ” he harshly

returned. "There—there's a present of a sixpence for you ; now, leave my shop."

"I thought—please, sir, I thought—it—it was worth far more than that," she hesitatingly observed.

"Did you? Get out of my shop, I tell you!" he roared, "and don't let me see you again ; and remember you gave it to me—I didn't buy it."

But Susie still lingered, and at last she got out the words—

"If you please, sir, it is my mother's portrait ; would you open it and give me one look at it, and I won't trouble you any more?"

The miser appeared struck dumb at the odd request, but mechanically complied, holding it well over that she might have a good look at the loved features.

Susie's eyes brimmed over at the sight, but with a mighty effort she strenuously winked away the tears, and chokingly got out the words—

"Please, would you just let Billy come in and have a look too?"

I don't know how the miser felt, but this, too, was conceded ; and he even, after Billy had been brought in and similarly favoured, gruffly inquired—

"Where's your mother now?"

Susie firmly resolved not to cry before him again, and had some determined winking at the tears and choking gulps at something that had risen in her throat, before she could get out—

"Mother—mother—is in heaven, and I wish we were there too."

She made a rush from the shop to get out before he should see her tears. He stared, and even called her back ; but she was afraid he would take back the sixpence, and hurried on till she had left the shop far behind. Then she satisfied Billy's hunger, and began to wonder what she would do next.

The wonder repeated itself during the day in her mind, but the solution did not come readily. The sixpence gradually dwindled away. A squeaking dog, which Billy fancied in a toy shop window, swallowed whole twopence, and the rest mostly disappeared in satisfying his hunger. This gave her no concern, for had she not promised to one now looking down on her from among the angels, that she would be a kind wee mother to him? What troubled her most was, where the next sixpence was to come from. So, while he was uproariously enjoying the grand sights and his new toy, she was—thinking.

Night came on and advanced ; the shops shut up one after another ; the passers-by became fewer and fewer ; and having wandered back to the south side again, they crept into a stair at the foot of Drummond Street to shelter themselves in some degree from the intense cold.

Billy would cry now, and persisted in saying that he wanted to get into a warm room near a big fire, and it taxed her to the utmost to get him quieted, for fear the people in the stair should hear them and come out. The squeaking dog had long since ceased to have any power over him, so she took him into her lap and covered him over as much as she could, and cuddled him close, and told him a wonderful fairy tale about two children that had no mother, and were wandering about in the cold, when all at once their icy surroundings opened up, and a bright light shone out on them from a warm heaven behind, and then a beautiful being all shining with gold came floating out towards them with a gush of sweet music, and took them up in his arms and kissed them, and told them they were not to be cold or hungry any more, and they were to see their mother, and were to rest in her bosom—and—and—

The fairy tale stopped there, and Billy fancied he heard a stifled sob, and put his wee hand through the darkness to touch Susie's cheek, and see if it were wet. But she wouldn't let him touch it, and clasped him closer, and told him to try and sleep, and dream grand dreams about waking among flowers in the bright warm sunshine ; and then she told him other fairy tales of a different kind, so fast that he could not get in a word, and at last forgot all about it and fell asleep.

But Susie didn't sleep. No, she sat staring straight out of the entry-mouth at the black wall and the old well opposite, half expecting that her fairy tale would come true, and the whole would open up before her eyes, till the sound of a slow foot-step on the other side made her shrink and hold her breath. But it was only an old man with a bag over his shoulder, warily picking his steps down the glassy slope. He got on well enough till he was opposite the well, where the ice was smooth and even, and then she saw his feet suddenly shoot out from under him, and his head come crash down on the hard pavement behind.

Susie gave out a frightened cry when she saw that the man lay very still, and gave out no sound but a faint moan ; and as the cry awoke Billy, they ran out and across the steep street together to the prostrate form. The street lamp shone full on

his face as she raised his head ; but it was not till she had brought water from the well and poured it on his face that he slowly opened his eyes, and she recognised Miser Gilpie.

He stared stupidly at the two figures chaffing his hands, and tenderly endeavouring to staunch the blood flowing from a cut at the back of his head ; but by-and-by, at a turn in the light, he recognised the girl and started back.

"Go away! go away!" he cried. "What do you haunt me for? Is it more money you want?"

"I saw you fall down, and was afraid you were killed," said Susie, only too glad to hear him speak. "Your head is cut at the back ; is it very, very sore?" and she gently stroked the wounded spot.

He stared into the two little faces, and she fancied his eyes got less fierce.

"You shouldn't have touched me," he cried at last, with an attempt at a snarl. "Why didn't you let me die?"

"What! do you want to die too, and you a man?" said Susie, in great wonder and pity.

"No, I don't want to die, but I don't want to be interfered with. Don't put your hands on me and look at me that way; do you hear me? Don't do it."

"I won't, sir—indeed I won't. If Billy and me go away now, do you think you'll be strong enough to get up yourself?"

"It doesn't matter to you. Yes—go away."

Susie turned at once, and he angrily called them back.

"Where are you going?"

The truth had very nearly jumped out, but recollecting herself, Susie merely said—

"I'm going away ; you told me to."

"No, I didn't ; and you mustn't contradict me, for if I did it, I didn't mean it. Aren't you sorry you ever had a mother, to bring you to all this misery?"

"No, I'm not sorry—oh, if I only had her now!" and Susie quivered, and quivered, and winked desperately, and tried to look indifferent and think of something else to keep back the blinding rush to her eyes.

"What's the good of mothers in the world, or fathers either?" growled the miser.

"They're for loving, and cuddling, and kissing," rapturously returned Susie. "Had you never a mother?"

He gave a sudden howl, that nearly made her fly the spot

But he did not attempt to strike her, and, moreover, turned away his face a little, so she took courage to come closer. Then a peculiar working about the muscles of his face, and a change in the expression of his eyes, caught her attention in a moment.

"You're crying!" she said sorrowfully. "I didn't mean to grieve you, indeed I didn't!"

"I'm not crying," he fiercely answered, with a sudden dash at his eyes with his hand, and turning full on her. "Ugly old men don't cry. Do you know that I'm horrible—and ugly—and hard-hearted—and a beast!" and his bitter tones rose almost to a shriek.

"You're not so very ugly; you're not ugly at all, just now," replied Susie, truthfully. "The water in your eyes makes you look kind and nice."

"But I'm not kind and nice, and I don't mean to be; so you needn't think to get anything out of me."

Susie flushed up to the roots of the hair at the words.

"I didn't mean that," she said, with wonderful firmness. "I think we'll go now, Billy."

"Stop! Come here; don't go away—don't leave me," he nastily cried. "I know you didn't mean that—ha, ha! I was only joking, you know—I only said it for fun. You won't be angry, will you?" and he appeared so anxious to conciliate the little queen, that she frankly said—

"Oh, no! I won't be angry at all—nor Billy either. But I think we must go."

"If you do, I'll die, and then you'll be taken up for murder," he said in awful tones. "Nobody would be sorry if I were to die."

"Oh! but they would. I would be sorry, and so would Billy. Although you say nasty things, I think it's only for fun, to frighten people. I don't think you mean it underneath."

"Do I say nasty things?—horrible, fierce things?" he reflectively inquired.

"Yes; but Billy and me 'ill pray for you, and then p'raps you'll get better. Your mother would pray for you too, if she was alive; but I suppose she's dead?"

He did not answer the question readily, but bent over his bag, as if adjusting it and putting it all right. It took him some time; but even when he had finished, he still carefully kept his face averted.

"What's your name?" he asked at last, in a sort of husky voice.

"Susie—Susie Howe; and this is Billy."

"I think you're a nice little girl. What made you think of praying?"

"Mother learnt me. I do it always, every night and morning. It's nice. Don't you do it too?"

"I—I—I—used to do it—long ago," was all he got out, and then he turned away and adjusted his bag again, and touched away at the side of his face, near his eyes, with his knuckles. At last he found his voice again, and said—

"Have you no friends, Susie?"

"No. There is one somewhere, but I couldn't find her out."

"Then, you're just like me. I have no friends either."

Susie was sorry for that.

"If you like, I'll be friends with you," she said, pityingly. "You've no mother, either; so you're like us in that too—only you're an old man, and I'm pretty young. I suppose you'll feel it worse than me?"

"I don't think you could like so frightful an old man as me?" doubtfully returned the miser, after a pause to examine his bag. "I'm like a devil, amn't I?"

"Yes, but that's only the outside. I think I could like you pretty well after a bit, when I get to know you better. Your looks wouldn't frighten me away so much as your nasty words."

"Ah! but I would try hard not to speak them," pleaded the old man.

"Well, Billy and me 'ill think about it. I think we'll become very good friends by and by. I'm glad you've got strong again and able to walk; but your head must be very sore."

"No, I don't feel it at all now. Stop; don't go away yet. See, here is a shilling. It's for you, and Billy too, of course; only you must promise me, before you go, that you'll come in to-morrow into my shop, and tell me all about your mother, and that, will you?"

"Oh yes, we'll come."

"And you might—just for fun, you know—come in about breakfast-time. It would be so funny to see us all taking hot tea and toasted bread and butter together—wouldn't it?"

"But I don't get tea yet—I'm too young," demurred Susie.

"Oh, then, I'll make warm bread and milk for you, and Billy too—with lots of sugar in it. Oh, it'll be grand!"

"I think I'll come," concluded Susie, who had caught sight of a voracious and glowing look on Billy's face. "Yes, we'll come. Good night."

And so they parted. The old man hobbled off, and, shortly after, Susie met a policeman, who directed them to a lodging-house, where they slept for the night. Next day they duly reported themselves to the old broker, and were received with an overflowing hospitality and kindness that fairly banished all reserve; and then, with many stops and quiet cryings, Susie told him her little story. What he thought of it did not appear; but at night he took them to a respectable widow's, a few streets off, where he left them, with the strict injunction that they were to come back again in the morning. That morning, as I have shown, Miser Gilpie had been destined never to see, and this concluded the children's story. But that does not end mine.

A few days after, in going down Leith Wynd, I came full on two well-known thieves, one of whom had a clumsy patch on the lappel of his velvet coat. I took them both up to the Office, carefully ripped off the patch, and then found that the scrap taken from the teeth of the dead broker exactly fitted and matched it. A gold necklet, with a locket and miniature attached, which I found on the other, I took home with me, and the cry of delight with which Susie greeted the first look at the portrait convinced me beyond doubt that it was that of her mother, which they had stolen from the broker on the night of his death. The two men were duly convicted, the evidence being supplemented by their own confession, which was to the effect that the fright of seeing the miser suddenly drop down dead before their eyes, after struggling hard with them, had effectually driven them off, without even looking for more. Being old offenders, their sentence was five years' penal servitude.

And was that all? No; not quite.

When the auctioneer came to arrange and catalogue the miser's goods, he began by making a rousing fire. But before he got it built a strange thing occurred. He had to split open the lump of wood found in the grasp of the dead broker, and between the boards he found a minute account of Gilpie's belongings, some bank-notes, a bank book, and a written paper, which I here copy:—

"I hereby bequeath all my possessions and money to Susan Howe and William Howe, conjointly, two children now residing with Mrs Harvey,

West Richmond Street, Edinburgh; and do appoint Mrs Harvey and John Lorimer trustees in the event of their minority at my death.

(Signed) "JOHN GILPIE."

Witnesses, { "JANE WHITE.
PETER WHITE."

The money and possessions alluded to, after all claims had been satisfied, and the parochial authorities had been refunded for their outlay on the miser, were properly invested, and yielded about eighty pounds a-year. It was not much, it is true; but it was more than Susie and Billy were ever likely to want; for the widow, Mrs Harvey, so took to them, that, when real relations turned up, she resolutely refused to part with them, and even offered to give up all the money, for the privilege of retaining them. The result was that they grew up well cared for and happy; and I may tell the reader that Susie is now a blooming young lady, and about to be married to a prosperous young Edinburgh merchant.

M'SWEENY AND HIS GHOST.

THE man who figures in the following sketch deserved to rise in his profession ; but he didn't. No ; like thousands more, he had his genius or ingenuity nipped in the bud at the very offset. When I say that he deserved to rise, I mean that his first appearance in Edinburgh showed a portentous quickness in making the most of a mistake and an accidental resemblance of features. The affair caused us much amusement at the time ; but it may lose a good deal of that on paper. Though the man's real name was Terrence Malone, he never after, till we saw the last of him, got anything but "M'Sweeny's Ghost ;" and nothing could irritate or annoy my chum more than to say, "I say, M'Sweeny, there's your ghost." As I was the primary cause of the mistake, I must begin with myself.

I was coming up the High Street one dark night in October, very tired and footsore, when I saw M'Sweeny, as I thought, hurry past me at the outer edge of the pavement. I turned at once, for I had some important directions to give him for next day, and shouted out sharply—

"M'Sweeny !"

The man paused, and just as he turned to face me, my hand was on his shoulder—

"Where are you going now ?" I asked.

The man had the same peculiarities of dress in which M'Sweeny prided himself so much, was of about the same height, and had the same red hair and whiskers, the same pimply nose and sharp twinkling eyes, and for the moment I had not the slightest doubt of his identity.

"Going," he echoed, with a strong brogue and a puzzled stare ; "I'm not going anywhere."

I started at the sound of his voice, and peered closer into his face through the darkness.

"Are you not M'Sweeny ?" I asked, not sure but he might be trying one of his detective tricks of disguise upon me. "Turn your face to the light."

The man wonderingly obeyed, and then my mistake dawned upon me.

"I beg your pardon," I hastily returned, feeling a little foolish; "I thought you were M'Sweeny, the detective."

"No, I'm not," he answered; "but perhaps I'm as good a man."

"You know him then?" I added, curiously.

"Ay, an' you too," he answered gruffly; and then he turned off, and I saw him no more.

In the brief glance at his face I had discovered two things: first, that his face bore the universal brand stamped by crime—the Cain's mark, which enables a professional ferret to pick out his "bairns" under any guise; and, second, that he was a new-comer—a stranger, who had never been through our hands. But in spite of these hastily-gleaned facts, the curious circumstance rapidly faded from my mind. I certainly mentioned it to no one at the time—people seldom do when they blunder; and other matters in a day or two completely hid it from my remembrance.

Not long after this meeting, a curious succession of odd circumstances occurred, that not only puzzled me, but wiser ones as well. The first, I think, was in a broker's shop in the Cowgate. I dropped in one night, in passing, and asked for a look at his purchase-book. He looked surprised, though he placed the book in my hands, and remarked—

"Why, M'Sweeny was in just a minute ago, the boy says, and he said there was nothing in it—nothing but the old watch you see marked there, and he took that away with him to compare at the Office."

"What!"

The word came out with an involuntary burst, and I stared at the man in a way that made him open his eyes.

"Took it away with him to compare," faintly repeated the man; "I suppose it's all right?"

I wasn't quite sure of that, though, of course, I took care not to say so. It seemed very strange to me how M'Sweeny, whom I had seen start for Burntisland on business only three hours before, could have got back so soon, and been in the broker's half-an-hour before me. However, allowing for some slight discrepancies in time, it was just possible that he might have managed it; so I said nothing, and forgot all about it till two days after. It happened that M'Sweeny and I were coming down the stair at the Office together, when he, for

some purpose of own, asked the loan of my watch. I handed it over, but at the same time remembered the broker's story.

"Ah, Jamie!" he said at last, with a grin, "I tould ye what all your hard work, an' your readin' at nights, an' your scribblin' at 'experiences,' and 'memoirs,' an' so on, would bring ye to. Begorra! yer moind's touched at last. Ye'll be in an asylum soon; an' when I come out to see ye, ye'll be tellin' me I'm yer great-grandmother, an' that my head's all bald on the top, like your own. Jamie, Jamie! take the first 'bus for Morningside, an' my blessing go wid ye."

"But I'm not joking at all," I persisted, when I had the laugh out, "I'm serious. I went in about seven, and he said you had got it half-an-hour before."

"Half-an-hour before? How could I be in the Cowgate and at Burntisland as well!" he reasoned, a little impatiently. "If ye're daft entirely, ye needn't make me the same. I don't want to go to Morningside along wid you. I couldn't cut myself in two, could I?"

"No, but the broker said it was you."

"Well, he was wrong then; for if he saw anything like me, it must have been my ghost."

"Your ghost?" I laughingly returned,—*"a red-headed ghost, with whiskers like bunches of broom. That would be something new in the ghost line—ha, ha, ha!"*

"Ay, laugh away," he grinned in reply, turning down the close to leave; "there's only one M'Sweeny in the detective line, an' ye won't see his ghost till he's dead and berrit."

"Don't be too sure of that," I banteringly returned.

He favoured me with one of his expressive winks.

"You an' the other boys have often tried to bother me wid yer jokes; but Jamie, ye never failed worse than ye did now," and with this rather equivocal retort he was gone.

Of course, by this time I had laid it down in my own mind that the broker, not M'Sweeny, had made the mistake, and resolved to correct it on the first opportunity. Chance, however, kept me away from that quarter for a day or two, and at the end of that short time the complications changed from the comical to the serious.

A lady from the West End appeared, in her own carriage, and bringing her footman as a witness, and inquired for the Lieutenant of Police, stating that she came to report a singular and daring robbery that had been committed at her residence

the night before by one of our detective staff—"an Irishman named M'Sweeny." As I was considered an interested party, and M'Sweeny happened to be absent at the moment, I was called in to listen to her story, which was as follows:—

About half-past seven o'clock the night before, her footman—a soft-headed young man, of that romantic kind who haunt the society of detectives under the impression that they are superior beings, different from ordinary mortals—had been proceeding quietly along Maitland Street towards the residence of his employer, when he saw before him a man going in the same direction, and peering sharply at the numbers of the houses; and fancying that he recognised him as a casual acquaintance, he touched him on the shoulder.

"Hullo, Mr M'Sweeny, what are you doing here?" he asked, with much reverence, taking the "detective's" hand and shaking it warmly.

"Business."

"Ah, yes! always at it," glowingly replied the romantic young footman—"always hunting for those desperate criminals. What a life you must have of it. Adventure—danger—perils—ah, how I wish I were you! But you don't seem to recognise me. Do you not remember me being introduced to you last week, and having a glass of beer with you in Rose Street?"

"Ha! no, I have forgotten that," said M'Sweeny's Ghost, speaking with perfect truth. "Bedad! an' I've forgotten your name, too."

"Mr Wanklyn," said the footman, to refresh his memory.

"Yis, Wanklyn—that's it," said M'Sweeny's Ghost, with awakening fervour. "An' ye're in service here, I s'pose?"

"Well, yes, I may say I am; at least there's an old lady here who has the honour of employing me," said the footman, with dignity.

"Ha, ha, ha! Mr Wanklyn, that's a mighty good joke of yours," laughed the Ghost, clapping him familiarly on the back. "An' what might be the number of your house, now?"

"This is it we are just coming to—No. —," was the eager reply. "Were you looking for a particular number? Remember, Mr M'Sweeny, if I can be of any assistance to you in your professional capacity, I shall feel honoured to render it."

"The very number!" exclaimed the other, bringing his hands together with an energetic slap. "And the name of your mistress?—I beg your pardon, I mane the lady who honours ye by payin' ye yer wages?"

"Mrs Jaffray," excitedly responded the footman. "Oh! is it possible! is there a case in connection with us!"

"The same!" eagerly cried M'Sweeny's Ghost. "The house, the number, and the lady! Well, Mr Wanklyn, I must see your mistress. It's a case of importance, and you can put the thing more gently to her by introducing me—ye see?"

"Certainly, certainly. Oh, Mr M'Sweeny, if it's not asking too much, before we go in perhaps you might tell me what is the matter? Is it robbers—ferocious burglars—meditating a descent upon our plate?"

"Yes, it's robbers—or rather one robber," returned the other, after a moment's thought. "Some one thinks to victimise ye, but we will be beforehand with him—oh, yes, I rather think we will!" and he nudged the young man in the side in facetious dabs, every one of which was thought a special honour.

"To be sure we will!" was the enthusiastic rejoinder. "They little know that I, Wanklyn, the friend and companion of detectives, am in the house. In our first interview, you put me up to a few things in the detective line—such as sitting in a dark room and waiting till the thieves jump into your hands, and all that; and I flatter myself that I have not forget 'em."

"Ye're right, Mr Wanklyn," impressively put in the other, with a cunning twinkle in his eye. "Between us two, we'll do something that'll make people open their eyes. As a fellow-detective, might I ask ye if your house is well guarded? I mane the windows, shutters, an' dures."

A fellow detective! The words almost took Mr Wanklyn's breath away. He managed, however, to sober down the pleased flush on his face to a look of great gravity and importance, as he said in reply—

"Mr M'Sweeny, I regret to say that the fastenings are anything but satisfactory. Perhaps, after your interview with my employer, you would do us the honour of inspecting them yourself?"

"The very thing I mane to do: that's my business here, or part of it," emphatically returned M'Sweeny's Ghost. "Ah! Mr Wanklyn, what a head ye have! It goes right into the heart of the thing. If we'd only a few men like you on our staff, the world would very soon be astonished;" and he worked the footman's hand in pump-handle fashion so fervently that the other began to think he was in heaven.

The world was to be astonished—by him, Wanklyn! His head rose in the air, and he let himself in at the front door

with the air of a lord who had already three estates rolling at his feet. M'Sweeny's Ghost was shown into the library to await the appearance of the lady, and during the slight interval he took possession of a pair of gold spectacles, two ornamental silver cups, and a number of other articles of value that could go conveniently into his pocket. As soon as Mrs Jaffray appeared, he assumed an off-hand, professional air, that at once allayed her alarm.

"It's nothing, ma'am," he said—"nothing to be alarmed at. I only want to go over your house and look at the shutter and dure fastenings. It'll soon get the wind that M'Sweeny has been here, and then the thieves will not trouble ye."

As the lady had already been primed by the footman with a glowing account of "M'Sweeny, the detective's," fame and skill, she made no demur to the very moderate request; and Mr Wanklyn was at once deputed to the task of showing him over the various rooms—a task which he performed with much enthusiasm, but no great watchfulness. During the inspection, M'Sweeny's Ghost managed to get rid of him more than once on various pretexts; and by the time it was over, every pocket in the Irishman's clothes must have been stuffed to overflowing.

Resisting every offer on the part of Mr Wanklyn to stay and partake of a refreshment, or to report himself once more to the lady, the clever thief got out of the house and was seen no more. No suspicion was excited that night; but next forenoon the lady's spectacles were missed from the library: a search was instituted; and then, to their horror, the daring robbery was laid bare.

The result was now before us in the persons of the lady and Mr Wanklyn himself, who, combined, had given us these details, and now stood waiting our decision, looking both excited and aggrieved.

I ventured no remark, though, puzzling as the various circumstances were, my thoughts were beginning to turn very decidedly in one direction. The Inspector looked grave, and touched the bell at his elbow, which was instantly answered.

"Has M'Sweeny come in yet?"

"Yes, sir."

"Send him in."

"Yes, sir;" and the policeman touched his forelock and disappeared, and in a moment was replaced by my chum, who came in, smiling and rubbing his hands, which were blue with cold.

"This lady wishes to speak to you," said the Inspector, retreating behind his books without another word.

M'Sweeny smiled his sweetest into the lady's face—it was certainly a compliment for an elderly bachelor like him to be inquired after by a lady.

"I'm glad to see ye, ma'am," he remarked, quite simply, seeing that she only stared in his face without a word. "Cowld weather we've had lately?"

"He is certainly very like him," said the lady at last addressing the Inspector. "Are there not two brothers of them on the staff?"

"No;" and the faintest trace of a smile lit the Inspector's face. "No, madam, there is but one M'Sweeny."

The compliment appeared to please M'Sweeny, for he rose at least two inches in the air.

"Then it must be he," said the lady, conclusively.

"Av coorse it's me, ma'am; and I'm at your sarvice," said M'Sweeny, with a delighted bow.

But he received no responsive smile; on the contrary, the lady favoured him with a haughty stare that nearly froze the blood in his veins.

"John," she said, turning sharply on Mr Wanklyn, "is this the man? Do you recognise him as M'Sweeny—the thief?"

"Recognise him!" echoed the footman, "certainly I do."

"M'Sweeny—the—the—thief?" slowly echoed M'Sweeny, staggering back, and fixing his piercing glance on the astonished Mr Wanklyn. "Did you say—I—I was a thafe?"

"Most certainly I did; you know you are," confidently returned the footman. "You know you are the robber. Oh! murder, murder! Help, help!"

M'Sweeny had sprung forward and seized the nose of Mr Wanklyn in his iron grasp, and pulled and tugged it about in great swinging wrenches, as if it had been a lump of indiarubber.

"I'm a thafe, am I!"—shouted M'Sweeny, keeping hold of the nose, and delivering a tremendous kick on the footman's coat-tails. "I'm a mane robber, am I? Take that, ye thafe of the world, an' that! an' that! an' that!" and with every word he kicked, and tugged, and pulled, in spite of every remonstrance, till he thought the yells of the footman would have taken the roof off. As for the lady, she only dropped into the nearest chair, violently jerking her lower extremities, and giving vent to a succession of tiny screams, which were quite lost in the general din, preparatory to going off in a real faint.

Finding words useless, I seized Mr Wanklyn by the shoulders and tried to drag him away ; but no—still M'Sweeny stuck to the nose, and still the busy foot kept plying at the coat-tails.

"Apologise, ye double-faced villain!" breathlessly shouted M'Sweeny. "Say I'm not a thafe; say it, or ye'll never have a nose to blow again!"

"You're not a thief," faintly came from the wriggling remains of the starched footman.

"Say I'm a noble-hearted Irishman, and the best detective in the world!" shouted M'Sweeny, his demands rising with the occasion, and making another dreadful tug at Wanklyn's nose.

"Noble-hearted Irishman! — best detective that ever breathed!" screamed the footman; and then, with a contemptuous jerk, he was tossed backwards against the horrified mistress.

"There! The blood of the M'Sweenys was up, and I don't think you'll say it again, so I forgive yez both," breathlessly gasped M'Sweeny; then, turning to the Inspector, he made his lowest bow. "I beg your pardon, sir," he added; "but I was only asserting the dignity of the Police. I suppose I may go now?"

"Not yet," was the grave reply; "I am not sure, indeed, but I may be compelled to place you under arrest. I am sorry to do it, considering your character and the number of years you have been in the force; but the public must be satisfied, and I have no doubt the matter will be very speedily cleared up."

M'Sweeny staggered now in earnest, white to the roots of the hair, and, with something like tears creeping into his eyes as he fixed them reproachfully in the Inspector's face—

"What!" he groaned out. "Is it possible, sir, that you believe I'm guilty?"

"I do not," was the frank rejoinder, which drew very decided expressions of disgust from both the lady and the crest-fallen footman; "but the affair is mysterious. I beg your pardon, Mr M'Govan, did you wish to speak?"

I did wish to speak, but what I said was in a low tone, and addressed to the Inspector's ear alone. I had remembered my mistake in the High Street with M'Sweeny's Ghost, and that, coupled with some strange occurrences which had come in my way not an hour before, made me positive that I had not only a clue to the mystery, but a good chance of recovering the stolen property as well. It took some time to make my case

clear ; but I was thoroughly in earnest, and succeeded in the end. After some minutes' thought, the Inspector turned to our visitors.

"You may go," he said, with a polite bow. "Good care will be taken that the real thief does not escape ; and Mr M'Govan assures me that there is every reason to hope for the recovery of the stolen property, which is almost saying that it is in our hands."

The door was promptly opened, and as the look of the Inspector allowed of no delay, the lady and her footman retired, each bestowing on M'Sweeny a withering glance, accompanied by a turning up of the nose that must have given them a crick in the neck.

I had **now** a great responsibility weighing upon me—to clear M'Sweeny, and secure his double, as well as to save the plunder from the melting-pot ; and looking at the case as I have given it, some may think the task by no means an easy one. Yet, though there was always the possibility of failure, I did not anticipate much trouble. I knew the appearance of the man I was in search of ; I knew, in a vague way, the locality about which he had been seen ; and, better still, I knew the identical "fence" he was likely to consult in the disposal of his newly acquired wealth ; and I believe, but for one curious circumstance, I might have had the whole—the thief, the reset, and the plunder—in the Office in the space of an hour at most. But alas ! such things are continually cropping up in cases of crime. There is no gauge to the greed of a successful robber—no stay to his brazen impudence. With the possession of wealth his spirits—his courage—rise ; he ventures a still more audacious feat as a last trick of the card, and—gets his wings clipped.

While I was on the hunt, then, and every moment getting nearer my quarry, two men were chuckling over their success in a dark "ken" in Hay's Close. These two were M'Sweeny's Ghost—Terrence Malone—and the "fence," to whom he had transferred all his valuables for a certain amount of coin—a Glasgow celebrity, named "The Crocus." Now, Terrence having made a hit, and expecting trouble to follow, had all the money in his pocket, all his luggage (his clothes) on his back, and a clear road before him for other quarters. He intended to leave the city, and might have done so, **but** for a brilliant suggestion of "Crocus."

"What would ye say to stripping M'Sweeny's house before

he gets home to dinner?" he said, in the midst of one of their merry bursts. "It would be one of the best jokes ever heard of. Tell his sister you're M'Sweeney's cousin, or something; then strip the house. I'll fence the swag and give ye full value; and then ye can hook it away, just the same. It wouldn't take ye half-an-hour."

"I'll do it!" said Malone, jumping at the idea. "And if that doesn't take the bounce out of them, I don't know what will. The prigs of the United Kingdom should join and give me a medal if I managed that;" and then they laughed till the place echoed again.

Reader, you have seen moths playing round a candle? Well, it was just as if one moth had said to the other, "Come along and let us have some more fun round this beautiful light." Whether my moths were destined to be burnt or not, will very quickly appear.

M'Sweeney's Ghost, instead of slipping quietly out of the city, turned down by St Mary's Wynd, and soon reached M'Sweeney's stair in the Pleasance. He paused as he reached the door, and listened intently. Though quick in decision, he was still anything but rash; and he knew too well that time was wearing on towards M'Sweeney's dinner-hour, and he had no wish to thrust his nose into the lion's den, with the lion at home. A savoury smell came wafting through the chinks of the door that made him lick his lips involuntarily, and brought forcibly to his mind the fact that he himself had not yet dined.

"I am just in time," he muttered with a sigh of satisfaction, as he detected no sound but that of a woman flitting to and fro. "It'll make the joke all the better if I eat his dinner as well."

He gave a bold, sounding knock, and the door was opened by M'Sweeney's sister.

"How are ye, Honor?" he said, with an impudent grin, offering her his hand.

She stared in his face in amazement.

"Shure, I'm well," she answered at last. "But I don't know you!"

"That's no wonder," he coolly returned, taking her hand and shaking it in a patronising way—"no wonder at all, seein' ye never set eyes on me before. Sure, I'm your cousin, Terry."

"My! Well, that's strange," she said, with the utmost simplicity; "I never heard of you before. Come in—come

in ; my brother Barney 'ill be in in twenty minutes or so ; but I never heard him spake of ye."

"I've just seen him up at the Office, and he sent me here," was the unblushing reply. "He scarcely knew me either. Ye see, Honor, I'm come all the way from Americy, an' I want to see all my friends an' spend some of my money among them afore I go back again."

"Well, now that I look at ye, Cousin Terry, you're as like Barney as two peas," returned Honor, with her faint doubts all gone. "I'm afraid, though, you'll think us mane, for there's not a drop in the house to set afore ye, and there's nobody I can send."

"Never mind, Honor," replied the thief, producing his purse with the air of a lord ; "ye sha'n't spend any money on me while I'm wid ye. See, there's half-a-crown: run down yerself to that shop—that shop in Canongate that I used to hear tell on that keeps good whisky—and get a bottle forment Barney coming home."

"The Canongate?" wonderingly echoed Honor ; "sure, that's a long way, and he'll be in afore I get back."

"Never mind that, it'll be the greater a surprise for him," hurriedly replied the impostor, in a fever of impatience to get rid of her. "Never mind dressing, just run as ye are ; it won't take ye two minutes."

"Two minutes!" echoed Honor. "I don't know how ye run in Americy, Cousin Terry, but here it takes five minutes to go down to that shop, and the same to come back, and it's considered quick walking, too."

"Ah, well ! I've no doubt ye'll be back as soon as I want ye," added the thief, with a grin. "There, don't mind me ; I'll make myself comfortable till ye come." And he planted himself by the fire, in M'Sweeny's chair, as naturally as if he had been a fixture there for years, while she tugged on her bonnet and hurried out with a bottle under her shawl, leaving the outer door slightly ajar.

The moment her flying footsteps had died away, the thief sprang up, and, with nimble fingers and a swiftness and skill that could only have resulted from long practice, ransacked every corner, box, and drawer in the house. He was pretty successful on the whole ; and though he had at first intended to take only money and valuables, he was induced to change his mind, and soon made up a very decent-sized bundle. This he laid down while he pocketed the more portable money

and valuables, chuckling particularly over one prize, which he thought might prove a complete mine of wealth in future swindles—a little staff of polished ebony, surmounted with a silver crown—M'Sweeny's badge of authority, which he had that day, by mischance, left at home in the pockets of one of his waistcoats. All this accomplished, he was about to lift the bundle and decamp, when, by some unlucky chance, his eye fell on the dinner in front of the fire—a nice little bit of meat roasting, with a batter pudding underneath.

"It would be a sin to lave that," he said, dropping the bundle; and in a twinkling he had it on the table and dished in a primitive way, with knife and fork and other accessories, which he picked up as best he could. Not a moment had been lost; for the meat had become a polished bone, and half of the pudding was already gone, when, happening to take a breath and raise his eyes, he saw in the open door a figure that made him jump to his feet as if he had been shot.

M'Sweeny, meditating on the griefs and cares of the day, had softly ascended the stair, entered by the open door, and reached the kitchen, only to be staggered—completely taken aback—by beholding, seated at his table and devouring his dinner, a living representation of himself! For a moment the two men stared at each other in blank amazement and silence, and certainly it would have puzzled a philosopher to decide which was the more petrified or alarmed. M'Sweeny's alarm and astonishment, of course, arose from the fact that he had never seen his Ghost before; and the other might well look petrified on being taken so suddenly down in the zenith of his success.

The impostor, as might be expected, was the first to find his tongue; and his words, for the moment, sent M'Sweeny's brain reeling.

"Well?" shouted the thief, putting on a ferocious look to cover his brazen impudence. "What the d—l do you want in my house?"

"Your house?" faintly returned M'Sweeny. "It's surely not your house. I think it's my house."

"Do you? Then the quicker you change your mind the better. Out ye go—quick!" and the thief brought the end of his fork down with an imperative thump on the table to enforce his command.

But it happened that at this moment M'Sweeny's eye caught the disordered state of the house, as well as the great

bundle lying at the man's feet ready to lift, and he woke as from a dream to the real state of affairs.

"Why, ye owdacious rogue! ye infernal petrification of a thafe!" he burst forth. "Is it possible that ye've been trying to rob *me*?"

"Rob you?" sneered the other, with amazing coolness. "More likely you've come to rob me. Get out, or I'll take ye up. I'm M'Sweeny, the detective."

"Ye're what?" cried M'Sweeny, starting back. "Ye blasted red-haired sinner, this is my house; and I mean to take you up, though I should never collar another!" and, with a spring, he was at him, and, after a brief struggle, managed to handcuff one of the thief's wrists to his own. Then, locking the door of the house, he got down to the street with his prisoner, and at once made for the Office.

But the impostor was not done yet. Scarcely had they reached the head of Drummond Street, when a policeman—a new hand and rather simple—hove in sight, and was instantly hailed by M'Sweeny's Ghost, who at the same moment produced a handcuff key from his pocket—part of the booty—and began unlocking his link of the bracelets.

"Here you," he cried, sharply and authoritatively, "take this man to the Office, while I go and look after the plunder."

M'Sweeny stared, utterly dumfounded by this new move, but recovered his voice when he saw the handcuff being snapped on the wrist of the policeman.

"Stop! stop! Secure this man!" he shouted, making a grasp at the impostor. "He's the thief. Ye great omadawn! don't you know me?—I'm M'Sweeny, the detective!"

The policeman stared helplessly from one to the other, not sure which to believe.

"I've heard of M'Sweeny, but I don't know him yet by sight," he said with hesitation, and in a moment the impostor took him up.

"Ye've heard of M'Sweeny!" he said, with a look of delight; "sure, that's me; and now ye'll know me again. Take that man away, I command you in the Queen's name!" and with a great flourish he whipped M'Sweeny's iittle ebony staff of authority from his pocket and held it before the policeman's eyes. "If ye can't believe me, ye can believe that. Refuse at your own peril."

M'Sweeny's eyes opened to their widest, his grasp relaxed as

he staggered back, and his mouth opened and jerked convulsively ; but not one word could he force out.

The impostor smiled, and touched his own brow significantly with his finger to the policeman as he turned away.

"I see you guess the truth," he coolly remarked ; "he is mad—mad as a March hare. Take him away ; but see that he does not escape, for he is a most daring thief."

At this moment—that is, just as these words were being uttered—it happened that I, having so far succeeded in my mission as to secure the reset and the plunder, and to trace the thief to M'Sweeny's house, came sharply up Drummond Street, and instantly sighted the crowd gathered round M'Sweeny and his Ghost. I hustled through at once, and the moment M'Sweeny's eyes lighted on my face, he uttered a shout of delight that might have been heard down at the Tron Kirk.

"Jamie, Jamie !" he cried, in a despairing burst, again grasping at the impostor, "tell me which of us is M'Sweeny—tell me quick ! for I begin to think I'm mad, an' have forgotten who I am !"

M'Sweeny's face would have been a fortune on the stage, for it always looked most comical when he was most solemnly in earnest ; and as these words fell on my ear, I laughed long and heartily. The whole position flashed upon me at a glance ; but as I had not forgotten his remarks about Morningside, I determined to have at least one dig at him in return. Pulling a long face, I appeared to scan the two faces long and earnestly, and then laid my hand on the arm of the impostor—and kept it there.

"This is M'Sweeny," I gravely answered ; and then, in the sternest tones I could assume, I added to M'Sweeny : "As for you, you are a vile impostor, called Terrence Malone. I have already secured your fence, 'The Crocus.'" Here the arm of the impostor trembled in my grasp. "The swag has all gone up to the Office, and he along with it ; and now I find you—you, the thief—here, mad, insane—actually believing that you are my chum, M'Sweeny. I think the best thing we could do," I added, addressing the impostor, "would be to hail the first 'bus for Morningside and take him out there. What do you think ?"

But the impostor did not seem to have any thoughts on the matter. He cowered and shrank, and altogether seemed to give it up for a bad job, which, after a moment, M'Sweeny was quick enough to notice, along with, perhaps, a slight twinkle of

mischief in my eye. I got a big punch in the side from my chum's disengaged hand, as he discovered the trick and burst into a laugh, and then I set him free, and we took the other to the Office and relieved him of the plunder.

"The Crocus" was already there, with all Mrs Jaffray's effects but the gold rim of her spectacles, which were never recovered ; and shortly after, the precious pair went to prison for three years a-piece. The old watch of the broker, and a number of other stolen articles, were found among the plunder and duly returned to their owners ; but it was years ere we heard the last of M'Sweeny and his Ghost.

TRACED BY A BOOK.

It was the second night after Christmas, and the Bridges from end to end were one long vista of brilliantly-lighted shops. Past these shops at a very slow pace went two figures—one very old, limping, and white haired, and the other very young, buoyant, and eager eyed.

“Oh, grandfather! only look—look at this window,” cried the boy, stopping before a confectioner’s window even more grandly decorated than its neighbours. “Oh, how beautiful!”

The old soldier thus addressed, though in great pain with his leg, and in still greater pain from the troubles that clouded his mind, stopped at once, and with the same bravery with which he had faced many an army, turned to the boy, hanging out a smile over all.

“Yes, Charlie, my boy!” he brightly returned, “and the best of it is, we see ’em all for nothing. Aren’t we well off?”

The boy’s face clouded a little at the enthusiastic question, and his eye travelled wistfully over the rich cakes and dainties in the window.

“No, we aren’t so *very* well off—not since your leg turned bad and you had to give up your place,” he hesitatingly replied.

“Not well off?” echoed the old man, drawing himself up in his slender clothing as if actually suffocating with warmth and over-feeding. “Hadn’t we some dinner to-day?”

“Yes, but you didn’t eat any of it,” quickly returned the boy; “I watched you—you only pretended to eat, and gave it all to Dotty and me.”

“Exactly—exactly,” responded the undaunted old man, after a pause to think, “that’s because dinners are so bad for a sore leg. You know, old wounds have to be studied, Charlie.”

“Yes.”

The boy’s answer came out very dubiously, as if the ingenious reason of the old man did not satisfy him.

“And then, only think,” pursued the old man, “I’m paid

for having that sore leg—whole sixpence a day—three-and-sixpence a week. If it wasn't for that, why we'd have to starve; for we couldn't go into the poor-house, and till my leg heals up again I can't work."

"I wouldn't like to starve, nor to let you and Dotty starve either," said the boy, reflectively, as his eye wandered through from the open window to the rich things inside. "I think I would rather steal and be taken up."

The iron grasp of the old soldier came down on the boy's shoulder with startling force, and as Charlie looked up in alarm, he saw his grandfather's face frozen with horror.

"Cha—Charlie?"—he hoarsely gasped, "what was that you said—steal?"

"Oh, grandfather, don't look so," cried the boy, with tears creeping into his eyes; "I only said I thought I would."

"There, of course, I knew you did," said the old man, winking desperately in turn, and looking away into all sorts of odd places, so that the light from the window should not fall on his face. "Look here, Charlie;" and he took the boy's shoulder in his hand and turned him round so as to look down the Bridge; "not there, at the people and shops, but up—up at the house tops, covered with snow. There, you see how white, and beautiful, and pure they are. Well, that's you and Dotty and me, living uprightly and honestly, and indebted to no one. But look down on the street now: you see it's all dirty and nasty, quite as black and ugly as—as—my old hat. Ha, ha! that's funny, isn't? ho, ho! only think, Charlie, as black as my hat! Well, as I was saying when this laughing stopped me, that black stuff, all trampled upon, is the people who have turned thieves. You see?"

Charlie did seem to see, for he looked thoughtful and shuddered.

"It's nice to be the pure white snow, isn't it, Charlie?" eagerly pursued the white-haired oracle.

"Yes, but it's pretty cold, isn't it, grandfather?"

"Never mind that," cried the old man. "Haven't we whole three-and-six a-week to keep us warm?"

"Ah! but two shillings goes for rent," observed the boy, with a sad smile at the old man's enthusiasm.

"So it does," was the undaunted reply, "leaving whole eightpence—clear, mind you, clear."

There was a slight pause. The boy was young—very young; but even to his mind there seemed to be a flaw in the reasoning.

"Yes, but that doesn't look much to keep *three* on, grandfather," he slowly got out at last.

"True, Charlie," hurriedly returned the old man, gulping something down quick to get the words out, "it doesn't look much. That's where the wonder lies. When I lay it out, it's always abundance;" and the glowing enunciation given to the last word conveyed the idea of food enough for a whole nation.

"Yes, but you had to sell your greatcoat last week. I saw you taking it out, for I wasn't asleep, but peeping out from under the bed-clothes, and now you've to go about shivering without it."

"Sell it?" echoed the old man, with a brave smile. "Why, Charlie—bless your simple little head!—I didn't sell it at all. I only lent it—lent it to—to—a gentleman who has been often kind to me before. He was very good, for he lent me eighteen-pence just a minute or two after, and said he was in no hurry for it back again; even though it was the summer it would do, or even as long as this time next year."

"And when will he give you your coat back again—your nice warm grey coat, that used to keep us so warm, so cosy, on top of our bed?" asked the boy, only half convinced.

"Oh, by and by, as soon as ever I go for it," was the hasty reply.

"Won't you go and ask it from him to-night, for I'm afraid we'll have no fire on again, and Dotty'll be so cold?" persisted the boy.

The old man turned sharply away and dabbled furtively at his eyes. The lights away down the Bridge seemed to interest him deeply, for he looked at them for a long while; and when at last he turned round to reply, his voice was strangely husky and shaky.

"No, not to-night, Charlie; it would scarcely be polite;" and the soldier drew himself up with the dignity of a millionaire.

The boy looked at the old man's shivering form and blue-cold hands, then round on the blackened and trampled snow, then on the hurrying smiling faces continually floating past them, and then at the delicacies so temptingly spread out in the window beside them, and then suddenly covered his face with his hands and burst into tears. Now the whole aspect of the old soldier changed, the smile vanished, a look of agony took its place, and he tenderly drew the boy close to him, with hands quivering violently with emotion.

"There, don't give way, Charlie, boy—don't; there's a good lad," he hoarsely whispered. "Charles the Great never cried; he always held up, and looked things in the face, and smiled, as I'm trying to do just now. Look at my face, Charlie, boy, and only see how awful happy I am;" and a strange contortion showed that the old man was trying to pull back something like a smile to his features.

"Oh, grandfather!" sobbed the boy, "why aren't we rich and happy, like every one else? And poor, poor Dotty so weak and hungry, and shivering all the day and crying for a fire to warm her? Oh, I wish I could beg! I'd do it, if it was only for her."

"Beg? beg?" waveringly echoed the old man, as if fighting with the idea himself. "No, it would never do for us to beg, Charlie. No, we must shut our troubles in our own breasts, and let nobody know but what we've heaps of money—I mean, greater heaps than we have. Begging is worse than stealing; and would ill become an old soldier who has fought under the Duke of Wellington. No, we must wait—wait till next pension day."

"What! is the money all done?" cried the boy, in horrified tones.

"I'm afraid it is," reluctantly admitted the old man, with as cheerful an aspect as he could assume. "But that's nothing, Charlie; we'll soon get more."

"Where will we get it?"

The question was simple and unsuspecting, but it brought no reply. The old man fidgeted for a moment or two in silence, and then drew the boy back from the lighted window away up towards Nicolson Street with a slow, weary limp, and a convulsed face that was now unmistakably tear-wet.

"I don't know where we'll get it, but it'll come, perhaps, without that," doubtfully responded the old man; "I don't think God will let us starve—at least Dotty; no, I don't think He will let poor wee Dotty starve;" and from the feverish way in which the idea was repeated, it was evident that Dotty held the uppermost place in the old man's thoughts.

Charlie noticed the unwonted emotion of the rigid old soldier, but he had no idea of its depth and intensity till they turned into a dark stair in Nicolson Street, which they slowly began to ascend. Before they had ascended many steps, Charlie felt the old man clutch him hard by the shoulders as he hoarsely whispered—

"How are we to face her, Charlie, after promising her so much?"

A smothered sob was the only answer.

"We must summon up philosophy to our aid," vaguely added the old man, trying to straighten himself up and make believe that he was not shaking all over.

"Philosophy—what's that?" asked the boy, with a sudden interest. "Is it something for eating?"

"No, but it's something that makes you able to bear hunger better—makes you think you are full when you're very empty."

"Ah! I don't think Dotty would understand that," thoughtfully returned the boy. "It's very hard, after all, that you, who never drink nor do wrong in any way, should be turned off whenever your leg turned bad. People who do right shouldn't starve."

Little did the boy know how his simple thought flashed home, and found a kindred reflection in the old man's breast. Yet still the old man kept up a brave front.

"We don't understand the ways of Providence," he chokingly returned. "Now, Charlie, remember when we go in we're to forget all our own troubles, and just think of cheering up Dotty; remember we're happy, and comfortable, and warm, and jolly, and couldn't eat—not though it was heaped up before us."

The painful climbing of the stair lasted a long time; but with all the pauses it came to an end too soon. The last stair was more like a ladder than anything else, but it had the advantage of echoing their footsteps; and before they had reached the low rickety door of the garret, the joyful cry of a child greeted them from within.

"That's her," eagerly whispered the old man, with a suggestive nudge. "Now, mind, Charlie—keep up, keep up!"

It was dark within, but the straggling reflection from some houses opposite gave enough light to show a bed in one corner, in which a little girl was sitting upright with outstretched arms, and eyes that for eager brightness might have lighted the whole room.

"Oh, granddaddy! I've been so weary, weary till you came!" sobbed the child as the old man lifted her in his arms and cuddled her close. "But I knew you would come, and I tried to think of all the things you were bringing me, and then I think I fell asleep, till I awoke in the dark and found it cold—cold."

A spasm of agony passed over the face of the old soldier, but it was unseen by the child, for it was banished, and a smile in its place in a moment.

"Charlie," said the old man, turning gravely to the boy, and trying to speak without a quiver, "do you think those grand things for Dotty will be here to-night?"

"I—I'm afraid not," was the hesitating reply.

"Not be here? But I—I—want them," cried the fevered child, starting back and looking from one to the other. "I want the bright lights, and the nice cool drinks, and the cakes, and the pretty toys, and the great big fire that is to roar up the chimney. Oh, granddaddy, you should have brought them with you; you promised to bring them with you—you promised to bring them, indeed you did;" and then she fairly gave way, and sobbed on his breast as if her wee heart would break.

Every word and every sob ran through the old soldier like a knife, and, though with a shower of endearing words he tried to soothe the child, his eye wandered half unconsciously over the contents of the room. But no; everything of value was gone—even the hard-worn silver medals which had once been his pride, and he turned again to the child with a stifled sigh.

Charlie, who had noted the whole, could keep up no longer, and turned hastily away to have it out quietly in the recess of the window, which jutted out on the slates. Exactly opposite, but rather lower down, two lighted windows caught his eye in spite of the blinding tears; and as soon as he had done with furtive knuckling, he became witness to a strange contrast to their own misery. The blinds of both windows were up, and one of the upper sashes even opened to the cold air; and inside he could see a merry wedding-party, floating in white muslins and silks, dancing, feasting, and enjoying themselves in the greatest happiness and glee. He could even hear faintly the sound of the music and laughter, and at last turned away with every drop of blood gone from his face, and a strange look in his eyes that would have frightened his grandfather had he only seen it.

"I must save them, even though I should have to beg," he said to himself. "It must be better to do that than let them die; and I know he will never give in. I'll do it, even though I should have to conceal it from him."

Dotty was now almost asleep in the arms of the old man, who had wrapped her in some of the scanty bed-clothes, and was now seated on the bed, facing the window, with all his artificial smiles gone, and a wan look of despair in their place. The look was favourable to the boy's plans, and he at once opened them up in an excited whisper.

"I know what we can do, grandfather. I can go down and see Mr Simpson. With him being in the same regiment as you, and knowing you so well, he's always very kind to me. He gives me something every time I see him—often a sixpence, and he might do it now. Would you let me go?"

He waited in trembling suspense while the old soldier thought over the proposition. It did not seem to please him greatly, for his face got troubled before the slow answer came—

"I'm afraid it would not do, Charlie. He might suspect—I mean he might think—we were in want. That would never do, you know."

"He might, for I will certainly tell him," thought the boy; but he knew the stern unbending principles of the old soldier too well to utter it aloud. "Oh, do let me go!" he pleaded, taking the old man on his weakest side. "I'm sure Mrs Simpson would send up something nice for Dotty."

"Ah! I believe she would," said the old man, starting as if out of a dream, and looking down tenderly on the sleeping child. "Yes, she would certainly send something, for she has a good heart, and loves Dotty almost as much as we do. But stop, Charlie: suppose I let you go, what will you say when you get there?"

"Oh! I will soon find something to say," hurriedly returned the boy. "Just let me go—that's all. May I go now?"

"No, that won't do, Charlie. It's not quite right, I'm afraid, but we must bend a little for Dotty's sake. You must have an excuse for calling. See, there's a book up there—you'll feel it back over; take it down and dust it, and then wrap it neatly in a bit of paper. Now mind, you're to say I sent you down with the book, and that I hope he'll enjoy it as well as the last one I lent him. And stop a moment: if they ask you to stay, don't appear too eager to go in. Remember, Charlie, you're a man, and must never disgrace your old grandfather."

The words brought a blush to the boy's cheek, for they seemed to point straight at the thought he was harbouring; but in the gloom of that cheerless garret it was unseen, and in another moment he was gone with flying feet. Hope lent him speed, for the little plot seemed to him almost certain to succeed. But if it failed? The thought only brought his teeth together with a determined clench, for he resolved, if it came to that, to reveal all; and one word of the real state of affairs, he was certain, would instantly evoke the active sympathies of the kind friends he was about to visit.

Judge, then, of his horror and despair when he found the house in darkness, and was told that the worthy couple were out somewhere for the night at a party. Whether he cried, or sat down, or at once walked away, I cannot tell, for it was never afterwards known to himself. He remembered being stunned and paralysed by the discovery—nothing more.

Now about this time it happened that a woman, in coming out of a shop at the head of Infirmary Street, with her hand full of change, slipped on the blackened snow, letting quite a shower of money roll far and wide over the pavement. Of course a crowd instantly gathered round to assist her to collect the money ; and in a short time, by counting it over, she found that she had it all but one coin—a five-shilling piece.

“It couldn’t be lost,” she persisted ; “it’s a big coin, and there’s nothing to hide it. Some one must have picked it up,” and she looked searchingly round on the crowding faces.

No one seemed to relish the idea ; but one boy, rather sharper than the rest, cried out—

“I think I saw somebody run round the corner in an awful hurry. He drappit that paper thing—at least I think it was him.”

The paper thing alluded to, which had fallen in the shade, was instantly pounced upon, when it was found to be a book, neatly wrapped in a piece of a newspaper. As this seemed to afford no clue to the thief, the woman turned once more to question the boy ; but only found that he, with most of the crowd, had prudently evaporated.

“Ye should tak’ it up to the Police Office,” suggested one of the loiterers ; “they may be able to get at the thief, though you canna.”

The woman had another despairing search around ; and at last, when every sympathiser was gone, she concluded that she could, at least, lose nothing by taking the advice, and made her way to the Office, where she stated her case, and left the book.

About an hour after, I looked in before going home for the night, and was shown the book. It was an account of the Peninsular War—to my mind a book not at all likely to interest a professional thief ; and seeing that the case was such a trifling one, I was about to lay it aside without comment, when by some means the fly-leaf came open in my fingers, and I read the following inscription :—

“CHARLES FOSTER,
No. — Nicolson Street,
Edinr.”

"I think I'll look up there before I go home," was my careless comment; and putting the book in my pocket, I left the office and sauntered out towards Nicolson Street.

Before all this was arranged, little Charlie—who was thought to be too small to be employed even as a message-boy—was toiling slowly up the stair in Nicolson Street with a fluttering heart, bearing a heavy load, which the feverish strength of the moment caused him to feel no more than the weight of a feather. There was a pennyworth of coal wrapped in a newspaper, some candles, some meat and bread, some beautiful frosted cakes out of the confectioner's, some gaudily-painted toys, and some coffee and sugar. He had never allowed himself a moment to think, but hurried from one shop to another till he had procured every article, and yet nothing was forgotten. What his thoughts now were at the prospect of facing his grandfather I cannot tell, but, like the reader, I can guess. His step on the last wooden stair was heavy, but it was nothing to the weight on his heart. He opened the door with profound thankfulness for the darkness that hid the guilt burning on his cheeks.

"Oh, grandfather, only feel!" he cried, holding out the parcels, and feeling ready to drop through the floor as he tried to get back something like his own voice by a long string of words. "I got five shillings, and I bought all these, and Dotty's cakes, and toys; and there's the change, and we'll have the big fire roaring up the chimney after all, and we'll be so happy and comfortable;" and then, strangely enough, he stopped and had a sharp burst of crying.

The old soldier wreathed his arms round the shrinking boy and caressed him fondly, but every endearment only sent a shudder through Charlie's young frame. For a moment the old man was too much agitated to speak; but, when he found voice, he said, solemnly—

"Charlie, before we touch a thing, let us kneel down and thank the kind Father who gave them. Oh! I prayed, Charlie, while you were out, as I think I never prayed before—not for myself, but for you and Dotty,—and He has heard my prayer. Kneel, Charlie, kneel."

"Oh, grandfather! I can't—indeed, I can't," came from the boy in a piteous burst. "I'm too wicked and bad—God would kill me if I tried it!" and he shook so, that the old man feared he was going into a fit, and tried to soothe him accordingly.

"Poor boy! poor boy! it is hard for you to suffer," he murmured, with a tender caress. "But I will pray and thank God for the kind friends He has raised up;" and kneeling down, he uttered a simple prayer, which, short as it was, nearly stifled Charlie at every word.

Charlie couldn't say Amen; no, he uttered a moan of anguish, and then shivered, and then flushed, and wondered if he could ever look his grandfather in the face again; and all the time the heart of the good old man was so full, that he noticed and suspected nothing.

"Now, light a candle, Charlie, and we'll get everything nice, and then wake Dotty. Oh, how thankful I am that we can keep our promise with her!"

"No, no—not yet, I like darkness," hastily interposed the boy. "Wait a little, till—till—I get the fire on."

"Good boy," murmured the old man to himself, "he has more thought than I; he fears the light would wake Dotty."

But, however slowly performed, the fire was built and lighted at last, and then the candle followed suit; and at the first glimpse of Charlie's face the old man started.

"Charlie, my boy, you are not well," he cried in alarm, taking the boy's wrists in his hands and feeling the quickened pulse. "We must put you to bed soon, or we will have two sick instead of one. Poor boy! how I wish I could suffer for you!"

Charlie could find no voice—no tongue. It was as if he had been suddenly struck dumb; but at this critical moment, when he was nearly dropping on his knees and groaning out all, it happened that Dotty stirred, opened her eyes in wide wonderment, and then started up to look round on the fairy-like accomplishment of her wishes. The glorious toys, the cakes, the big fire roaring up the chimney, the lighted candle—everything was there; and as her wee handies came together in a burst of ecstasy, even Charlie almost forgot his guilt in her happiness.

The table was neatly spread, more coals heaped on the fire, and Dotty wrapped in bed-clothes and propped up close to the table; and then the old man said grace in a choking voice, and, with many a furtive tear, the happy meal was begun.

Happy, did I say? Well, if a spirit or brownie could have skimmed over every house and fireside in the dark city on that eventful night, I don't think he could have found greater happiness or deeper misery than sat at the little table, in that wretched-looking garret in Nicolson Street. But then the

misery was concealed, and the picture as it stood was all brightness, smiles, and ruddy glow.

It was now to be disturbed, crushed, and shattered, and every illusion dispelled, and the rude hand that was to do the work was my own.

It was at this time—I mean, when the happy meal had barely been begun—that I reached what I thought the top storey of the stair. Not finding any one of the name, but being told that it was probably “the old man up in the garret,” I sent up the policeman I had picked up in the street below to make inquiries; and it was the heavy tramp of this man’s feet that first disturbed the three, and caused them to listen wonderingly and with bated breath. The thundering knock was answered by Charlie, whose heart died within him at the first glimpse of the glaring lantern, glazed hat, and heavy overcoat of the policeman.

“Does one Charles Foster live here?” was the first question; and the old soldier, putting down Dotty and coming out from behind the table, answered it in person.

“He does: I am Charles Foster,” he answered, readily and clearly. “Is there anything wrong?”

The policeman shuffled and fidgeted before the clear, soldierly eye, and without answering, turned round and called down the stair—

“It’s here, and the man too, Mr M’Govan.”

“M’Govan!” echoed Foster, in alarm; “that’s a detective. There must be something wrong.”

Had he only turned to look at the face of the cowering boy, he might have seen and read all, but he did not, and I was before him in a moment.

“You are Charles Foster?” I began.

“I am.”

“Do you know this book?”

He looked at it—a mere glance, without taking it from my hand—and said—

“I do—it belongs to me.”

I was rather staggered by the free answers, but had to bring out the worst.

“Ah! I am sorry for you. I am empowered to arrest you on suspicion of having committed a theft of five shillings. It was dropped by a woman at the head of Infirmary Street, and snatched up by some one, who, in the hurry of escape, dropped this book.”

Never, I believe, in all my experience, did I behold such an appalling look as that which instantly blanched and clouded the old man's face at these simple words. He staggered right round and looked straight at the guilty boy, and then dropped heavily into a seat and covered his ashy face with his hands.

"Oh, God! Oh God!" he groaned out; "all my teaching—all my prayers—and it has come to this! Why did I live to see it? Why was I not killed in battle? To be spared for this!" and then, with a burst, the tears came, shaking his form like that of a child.

"Oh, grandfather! I did not know"—burst in the boy, springing forward and dropping on his knees before the old man.

"Hush!" fearfully interrupted the old man, starting up and placing his hand on the boy's lips; "not a word for your life! It is done now, and I am old—old and useless. Remember! not a word!" and, putting the boy gently aside, he turned with a calm front to me.

"I regret to say," he began, with scarcely a quiver in his voice, "that your charge is only too well-founded. I am guilty—doubly guilty; for what occasion could an old soldier, enjoying a full pension, have for stealing? Here is the remainder of the money. I deserve to be severely punished for setting such a bad example to my poor grandchildren. I am ready to go," and he held out his hands for the handcuffs.

Here I interposed.

"I am afraid you are not acting very wisely," I said; "everything you now say will be used against you. There is something strange about your manner which I do not understand. You seem all frankness; and yet there is something, I am convinced, that you are keeping back. You are surely not an old offender, and anxious to get into prison?"

"I am an old offender," incoherently persisted the old man; "I am very bad. I think I have stolen a great many things. Yes, I think I must have been a thief a long time. It's my bad nature that prompted me to it—not want; oh no! not want. I think I drink a great deal, too; yes, I am an awful drunkard. That's where all the money goes that I have stolen. I am a depraved old wretch, but the children are innocent—mind, the children are innocent, Poor wee lambs! they'll miss me; but it's better that they should not grow up to be corrupted and made thieves! Take me away—quick! quick!" and this time he could hardly shake off the clinging, screaming

boy, and appeared anxious to keep talking, so that he should not get in a word.

But the boy would not be repressed, and turned wildly to me.

"Oh, sir!" he screamed out, "don't listen to him—I am the thief!" and then he dropped clean away in a faint.

"You see," cried the old man, as he tenderly raised the boy in his arms—"you see, with all my faults and cruelty, how the children love me. The poor boy would actually take the guilt upon himself to save me. Oh! I do not deserve it. Take me away, quick, before he recovers! I will be miserable till I am really in prison, and locked up in the coldest and darkest cell."

He again held out his wrists to the policeman for the handcuffs, but I could not allow that. Utterly incomprehensible as the whole was to me, there was something in the old man's manner and words that thrilled me through and through. I glanced round at the bare walls and newly-lit fire and candle, and thought I understood it all, which I certainly did not.

The old man laid the boy on the bed, and lifted the sobbing child in his arms.

"Poor wee Dotty! you mustn't cry," he said, kissing her tenderly. "Charlie's not very well, but he'll get better after I'm gone; and then you'll tell him to keep up um's little heart till I see you again, when I come back from the grand house. Oh, you've no idea what a grand house I'm going to! And they are going to give me all my food for nothing, and be so kind to me. Won't that be grand?"

"Take me with you," sobbed the child in reply. I want to go to the grand house, too—with Charlie, when he wakes."

But the simple words only blanched the cheeks of the old man.

"No, no, dearie; Charlie mustn't go to the grand house, nor you either. Ha, ha! isn't it good that we are to be so well off! Kiss me again, and say you're glad. Charlie will take you down to Mrs Simpson's till I come home, and you'll be so warm and nice. Another kiss. Good-bye."

And, with a smiling face to the last, the old man tore himself from the screaming child, and left the house in our company.

He was duly locked up; but I am glad to say the case never came to light. Before an hour was gone, representations came in from several quarters which could not be lightly set aside, although they went directly against the confession he had uttered in my presence.

In the morning, when the case was called, there were no witnesses against the prisoner ; but if there was one, I should say there were twenty for him—some of them gentlemen of the highest standing, who had served in the army as officers, and known Foster the best part of his life. The wild confession he had made to me was set aside as caused by some derangement of the brain, and was proved to be utterly absurd in many of its most important particulars. The result was that the old man was discharged ; and I daresay I should never have discovered the secret of the simple affair had it not been for little Charlie, who in time became a man, and got connected with the fire brigade at the Head Office. He and I had many a talk together ; but it was long ere he told me of our first meeting, upon the occasion of his first and last theft.

Dotty is nearly a woman now, and almost as tall as her brother, with a plump, rosy face, and the warmest smile in the world ; and if she should read this, she will see that I have at least tried to do justice to her dear dead grandfather.

A WOMAN'S REVENGE.

A FEW years ago, a great deal of sensational nonsense and excitement was got up about the poor ill-used ticket-of-leave man. Plays were written about him; stirring articles and pathetic letters appeared in the newspapers about his sufferings and wrongs, headed with the most moving and attractive of titles, and all tending to show that he was the most virtuous and unfortunate of human beings. It was the popular clap-trap of the time, and was swallowed eagerly and without question. Now it is pretty much out of fashion; but there is a lingering fondness in the public mind for tickets-of-leave, and the good supposed to result from them. I have an opinion of my own on the matter; but as I have no wish to bring a nest of hornets about my ears, I will keep it to myself. It is founded on experience, too; but that has no weight when you are treading on other people's corny toes, by opposing their pet theories.

Here, however, I have to give my experience of one ticket-of-leave man, and at the same time have done with a criminal who gave me more trouble and concern than any other three put together. I do not give him as a sample of all ticket-of-leave men: I only wish to show that it is just possible that these amiable pets may have old scores to reckon up and pay off when they are so kindly set at liberty after a few years' imprisonment. At the same time, it will illustrate what I have now seen so often that I begin to believe that it is a kind of invisible law of the universe—that is, retribution. Wolves, when they have torn and eaten the common foe, sometimes quarrel and devour each other. Criminals are human wolves, and act true to the same instinct.

“And Jim Maclusky is recommended for a ticket-of-leave.”

This startling piece of news came in, in a string of gossip, from the mouth of the sergeant one morning in the muster-room. A dead silence followed the momentary start, and every eye was fixed on me.

"Are you sure of that?" I said, quietly, though I knew well enough what the looks meant.

"Quite; and he will get it too." Another dead silence.

What the others thought of I know not, but my mind ran back to the night of the trapping, and Jim Maclusky's last words to me—

"I will live to kill you!"

I am not naturally nervous. The sight of blood does not sicken me, though I don't like to look at it; and when I am fairly wrought up with excitement I would face anything. Still I felt concerned. It is not pleasant to know yourself to be surrounded and followed by an invisible and palpable danger. You cannot face it or fight it. If Jim Maclusky were liberated, there was nothing for me but incessant watchfulness and wariness. Of course, nobody liked to say anything to me plump and plain, but I read it in their faces. It did not frighten me—it only set me a-thinking. M'Sweeny scratched his head, and, not quite able to conceal the drift of his thoughts, broke the awkward silence with the words—

"Well, if I had the makin' of the laws they'd be different. The police 'ud have more say in a matter like this. It isn't safe to let a man like that go free—begorra! it isn't;" and he shook his clenched fist and looked round as if he defied us to dispute it.

The sergeant took a snuff, blew his nose vigorously, and fidgeted a little.

"Well, you see, Mr M'Sweeny, they say there is not a single mark against him in the prison books."

"I daresay not; the cunnin' hound hasn't done that for nothin'."

"And then he has been quick, and intelligent, and obliging, I hear, and of great service in controlling the other prisoners."

"Of coorse; he knows them all, and would make them do anything wid that multaverin' tongue of his. He'd promise them heaven itself when he got out if he thought they'd believe him."

"And then he has appeared quite a changed man."

"Och, the hypocrite!"

"And promises to do better when he gets out."

"He'll keep that promise anyhow. 'Twas only forgery before; this time it'll be—"

A furtive side glance at me supplied both the nature of the unexpected crime and the principal sufferer.

"But, luck here now, boys," warmly continued M'Sweeny, bringing his clenched hand energetically down on the other palm. "If the vagabone gets out, an' harms any one here, whether the law touches him or not, I'll take id out of his skin. Ye needn't laugh, for I'm in arnest. Oh! laugh away, boys; it's the only thing you're good at, barrin' aiting, when the praties is good;" and he flushed up as the laugh ran round the room, and certainly looked the most serious there.

No more was said at the time. We separated to our several rounds, and the subject appeared to be forgotten. A few weeks after, Jim Maclusky was at liberty and back to Edinburgh. I heard the news some time before I saw him; but at last we met full in the face in the High Street, a little below Niddry Street. I gave him a nod as a feeler, and was instantly favoured with a look of deep unswerving hate, which gave me a good cue to his after proceedings. Then I had time to notice a thing that surprised me not a little. Maclusky was in company, and apparently on the best of terms, with one of his cast-off mistresses, a girl called Meenie Stark; and I puzzled myself in vain to think what had brought the two together again. He had wronged her—that is, had made her what she was,—then repaid her devotion with brutal ill-usage and neglect, then had taken another mistress, and tossed Meenie out into the gutter to freeze or die, and then had tried his utmost to hunt her down and crush the life out of her; and I know that at that moment she hated him more thoroughly and deeply than it was possible for him to hate me.

And yet there she was, smiling and fawning, and apparently hanging on his very looks. What could it mean? She was not bad, in the widest sense. She was a thief of course, and an expert one, too, but that was all. She did not mix with the herd. More: she had a tender, feeling heart, and I have many a time watched her, unseen, doing little acts of kindness and benevolence. But though I said to myself, "That might have been a good woman," I never attempted to approach her except when she was absolutely "wanted." There was a kind of repellent ferocity about her that made me fear her. It was not there naturally, but had been ground into her by misfortune and an evil fate, and it gave her a reckless daring that nothing could subdue. Though no one had a bad word for her, I had studied her well, and my conclusion was that I would sooner have any one for my enemy than that woman.

This was the woman who seemed to have suddenly linked

herself to Maclusky. Had she forgotten her wrongs? Had she forgotten that one drive of his cruel hard knuckles had given her child its death-blow? Was she now to be a whole mine of strength to him in all his schemes and plans? or was he unconsciously treading on a slumbering volcano? I did not know. I could not make it out at all, though I gave the odd circumstance so much thought as almost to forget my own case and danger.

A good many weeks passed away, and I was still safe and unhurt. The delay did not surprise me much, though I had now positive information that Maclusky meant mischief, and towards me, and I knew the man's cautious, deadly nature well; but it did not tend to make me less watchful and suspicious.

Openly, of course, I had nothing to fear. If danger came, it would come in the dark, and where neither assistance nor a rescue was to be feared.

"M'Govan! Hist! speak a moment, please."

A woman with her head and shoulders muffled in a shawl had caught at my arm in the darkness of Middleton's Entry with these words, as I hurried through towards my home. I shook off the hand without ceremony, and got out of the shade as quickly as possible, but the woman was still at my side.

"It's me—Meenie Stark," she said, eagerly, for a moment drawing back the shawl from her face. "Don't go away—I have something to tell you. I have waited two hours to see you."

Her voice was broken, and her tone flurried and anxious; but it was something unusual about the face that stopped me and chained me to the spot. Dim as the light was, I could see her quivering; and I had suddenly become interested and curious.

"Let's see your face, Meenie," I said, with something like pity in my voice.

Slowly and reluctantly she drew back the covering, and showed a bruised face, swollen and disfigured, a black eye, and a forehead bound round tight with a white bandage.

"Ah! Jim has done it again," I simply remarked. "He has hurt you."

"He *has* hurt me!" she cried, with a strange energy, pressing both hands tight on her heart as she wailed forth the words. "Yes, he has hurt me," and it was quite evident that the hurt she alluded to had struck deeper than the skin marks which had just excited my commiseration.

"I wonder you took up with him again."

She suddenly caught my arm so tightly that her nails almost went through the cloth.

"What! Do you, even you, wonder at that?" she breathed, with a curious wild look in her eyes. "Oh, I prayed—how I prayed!—that he would not die in prison; and God, or the devil, heard my prayer, and he got out at last. Do you think it is an awful thing—a very awful thing—to commit murder?" she added, breaking off.

"It is—the worst of crimes."

"And yet he did it!" and the words came out like a fierce hot blast.

"I know he did. Poor M'Dermott—"

"Not him! My child, that sucked these breasts and shone up in my face like a little heaven—he killed it. Oh! I could have borne all—he might have chopped me in pieces, or burned me alive, if he chose, if he had only spared my wee bairn. It was buried; and I think all my blood turned to gall after that. They think I'm strange and mad at times; and so I am. When I think of the past, my brain becomes a flood of fire, and I could throw a house into the air. I try to keep it down by thinking of other things, but it comes back. And it will come again. *I'm afraid he'll die one of these nights.*"

"I always thought you something above the common, Meenie; I hope you're not going to turn a fool now. What good would his death do you?"

"It would give me rest—rest!" she fiercely gasped out. "There's a longing—a burning longing—here which cries for something;" and she smote her breast with her clenched hand. "I don't know what it is, but I see knives and blood sometimes when I wake of a night;" and she drew her hand over her eyes, as if she saw them then.

"I am sorry for you." I said it, and I felt it.

"I know you are. You were always kind-hearted, though you are sharp and strict. You were kind to me once, and I have not forgotten it."

"I think you're mistaken."

"I am not. A brute of a policeman struck me in the lobby as he was taking me down to the cells. You saw it, and I think I see the expression of your face this minute. You hurled him off back against the wall, for your blood was up in a minute, and then hustled him back into court with your own hand, where he was convicted and fined."

"Ah! I have a faint recollection of something of the kind ; but that's surely years ago?"

"Yes ; but women have long memories. It was that which brought me here, for I will not see you harmed. You are in danger."

"From Jim? I know that already."

"Yes, but it is coming soon ; how, I don't know yet. They're making it up among themselves, and planning it all out. But you need not be in any great fear. I've heard why you trapped him—because M'Dermott, the man he killed, had been kind to your mother, and I will watch for you."

"It is very kind of you, Meenie—thank you. But could you not—?"

"Don't try to talk to me like that ; it goes through me like a knife," she interrupted, almost fiercely. "I know what you would advise, but it's no use with me. If there's a hell anywhere, I'm going to it—I know it. I sometimes think I feel it already. I dream that I am dead, and it always seems as if I had been hanged first. Perhaps I'm only mad. Do you think I could be mad without knowing it?"

"As long as you are afraid of turning mad, there's not much to fear," I cheerfully returned. "If you were mad, you would very likely think yourself sane."

"I know all that ; but I fear it because I have grown so much afraid of moonlight. When I wake up in the dark, I'm all right ; but when the moonlight is streaming in, it chills me to the heart. I would sooner see my mother's ghost, for I always think I see a bloody knife sticking through the cold light. He knows nothing of it. He thinks I'm bright and happy, and joyful in being near him. Oh, Heaven! how will it all end?" and if Maclusky could have seen the wild sweep of her arm through the air, and heard the woful sharp ring of her voice, I question whether he would have slept calmly that night.

I was roused—thrilled through, but could not exactly hit upon any good suggestion that she was likely to adopt.

"Get away from him," I said at last. "You are not fit to be near him: it is dangerous. If I can help you in anything—"

"You can't; don't speak of it. It is dangerous ; but I will see the end of this affair—I will watch it out. What lies beyond, God only knows."

She was gone, without another word. I watched her flying figure for a minute, till it melted like a shadow in the darkness, and then I sadly took my way home

A few nights after, instead of getting comfortably home when my work was done, I was sent away out past Merchiston to see about a house robbery that had been reported. I am no believer in presentiments—I have had the feeling so often, and nothing has come of it,—but I must say that that night there was a feeling of uneasiness about me every foot of the lonely road. I was continually starting and looking over my shoulder. Sometimes I would suddenly stop, hold my breath, and listen, fancying I had heard the rustle of some one following close behind.

Owing to a meagreness in the address I did not find the house, and at last concluded that I would return, and see after it next day. First, however, I struck a light, and had a look at the note that had been sent in. There it was, written in a lady-like hand, headed “Rixon Cottage, Breezy Brae,” and particularly requesting the immediate services of “Detective M’Govan.”

I did not look at it long, owing to a queer circumstance. The light I had struck of course shone full on my own face; and had any one been watching me from a distance, they would have recognised me distinctly. It was different with me: the light formed a kind of screen through which it was difficult for me to penetrate at a glance.

A kind of rustle made me look up over the open letter, and then I fancied I saw against the tail hedge opposite, and a little distance further along, the shadowy form of a woman. Though startled a little, I deliberately extinguished the light, crushed up the note in my hand, and looked again. It was gone. I walked along the road till opposite the hedge, and listened. There was a gap in the hedge, but no sound of retreating footsteps or a rustling dress. I was about to cross and peer through, when a footstep behind me, coming in my direction, made me look round. I saw that it was the figure of a man; and not wishing to appear as if I was loitering, I walked on slowly in the direction of Edinburgh, thinking he would overtake me and pass on. But he didn’t. He appeared to have accidentally struck the same pace as myself, for I got as far as Greenhill, and on looking round saw him exactly the same distance behind. I cut along through Bruntsfield Links as a quicker road home, and there our roads seemed to have separated, for I no longer heard the pad-padding of his footsteps behind me. I had nearly reached the Meadows, when a man suddenly stepped out into the dim light before me from behind one of

the trees, and cautiously raised his hand. I started well back, for it was possible that it might be the same who had been behind me, and that he had just cut round at the other side at a quicker pace than myself; and, besides, the force of habit was strong on me. I had done the same for weeks.

"Don't be afraid, Mr M'Govan," said the man, in a smooth, sneaking tone. "It's only Tony—Tony Brand;" and then I recognised one of Maclusky's new companions—the nucleus, perhaps, of a fresh gang.

"Well, don't come near me—I don't like it!" I sharply returned, keeping one hand in my coat-pocket. "What do you want?"

"Oh! nothing; only I've been looking for you all the afternoon, and at last I went up to the Office, and they said you were out this way, and I waited here for you."

"Were you following me—out by the Merchiston Road?"

"Following you?" he echoed, with an innocent and surprised look. "I don't know what you mean. And where is the Merchiston Road? You know I'm quite a stranger in Edinburgh."

"Yes, stranger than welcome," I shortly returned. "Bah! Never mind about the following; I don't care whether you did or not—it may amuse you, and it certainly does me no harm. What are you up to?"

"You won't betray me?" he said, cautiously.

"I have no time for nonsense," I said, moving away. "Say it at once, or I'm off."

"Well, I will. Stop—how much will you give if I betray Maclusky into your hands?"

"I will give you—three kicks and a pocketful of nothing. Why should I do otherwise?"

"I thought you had an old grudge against him."

"Did you?"

"Yes; and I can tell you another thing;" and here his voice sank to a whisper. "If you don't nab him soon, he'll —" and he suggestively drew his fingers across his throat, and then made a pointed dab through the air towards me.

"I'm much obliged to him. I hope he'll get the chance," I derisively replied. "Well, is that all?"

"No; but if you don't want him nabbed—"

"Oh! but I do, and you too, if I can manage it. I'm paid for that, you know."

"Well, you can nab him to-night if you like."

"How?"

"On two conditions. I'll tell you. First," and he whispered something in my ear; "and, second, that you write me an order for a lodging in the Police Office till I can get safe out of Edinburgh. My life wouldn't be worth a brass farthing after betraying him. Do you agree?"

"I agree. Let's hear the rest."

"Well; you're not afraid to tackle him alone?"

"No—or both of you, if it came to that."

"Well, we arranged to crack a crib at the Grange to-night—No. — Dick Place. It is empty, and the plumbers have been working at it some time, and keep their ladder—a long one—in the garden behind. We were to get in by the roof, using the ladder, and make a clean haul to-night, as the family will be back from the country to-morrow or next day. He is away there now, and I was to follow about this time. You are about my size. Change coats, mufflers, and caps with me, and go there instead of me, and the thing is done."

I thought for a while. In reality, I may say, I was eager to capture Maclusky, as the constant strain of watchfulness was beginning to weary me. More: even if this should turn out a scheme to entrap me, I was not afraid to face Maclusky if he were alone. But still something said to me, above every consideration, "Don't go."

"Is he alone?" I asked at last.

"He is. There's not a soul there but himself."

I had another minute's thinking.

"I'll swear it, if you like," he said at last.

"I daresay you will—or anything else; but I don't want that. I'll go. Off with the togs."

"Write out the line first."

"I will, while you take them off."

I scribbled out the line, which he carefully read over, and then we changed coats, caps, and mufflers.

"Aren't you afraid it's only a scheme to run off with your coat?" he asked with an ugly leer. "I might bolt—eh?"

"No! I will prevent that." I said; and I meant it, as the reader will see presently. "Will you oblige me for a moment?" I said, recollecting myself, and possessing myself of the pistols in my coat-pocket. "I might find them handy, and of course they're of no use to you."

"A pair of barkers—very good. Yes, it's as well to be prepared," he said; but he looked sulky nevertheless.

We walked along together as far as the Middle Walk, where I stopped to turn up to the Lover's Loan, and held him in talk till the policeman of the beat appeared in sight.

With a sharp whistle and a shout I pounced on Tony Brand and held him fast. He seemed petrified with astonishment, but I had him handcuffed in a twinkling.

"Take that man to the Office at once," I said to the policeman. "Get help if you need it, but don't lose him. I have to go somewhere, and will be there by and by."

"I'm much obliged to you, but it's not at all necessary; I will go myself," broke in Tony Brand, with an attempt to conceal his chagrin and alarm under a smile. "I swear—"

"Ay, swear away, as long as you please. Good-night;" and I was off, while he was lugged away in the opposite direction.

In the Lover's Loan I again fancied I heard the rustling, gliding sound behind me; and looking suddenly back, I now distinctly saw, by the dim light of the rising moon, the figure of a woman down near the bottom of the straight walk. She was coming in my direction, too—at least I fancied so,—though she stopped and hesitated. But what was that to me? I was now in the town, so to speak, and any one might be going in the same direction as myself. I hurried on, and thought of it no more.

I got down to Dick Place, made sure that I was at the right house, and listened intently.

There was no sound of any one stirring within. Looking through the iron railings, I saw a good deal of litter and rubbish lying about. Good: so far things tallied with Tony Brand's story. I got up on the stone kerb, and thence, with some difficulty, pulled myself up and over the spiky iron railings, feeling as I dropped into the garden inside, that it was just possible that Maclusky was there—looking down upon me at that moment. Cautiously and quietly I crept round to the back of the house, and then my heart gave a bound. Standing against the house, at the proper angle, and reaching to the roof, was a strong, heavy ladder, such as is used by plumbers. I was now in the shade; but seeing it distinctly against the sky, I groped my way towards it without hesitation. I felt by the softness of the ground that I was crossing a flower-plot, and treading down flowers on the way; but I was too eager and excited to think of anything but reaching the ladder. Before I had gone half the distance, I suddenly made a step upon nothing, and went tumbling down nearly six feet into a deep square hole. I

was a little bruised and startled, but not hurt, and would have clambered out at once without thinking anything of it, had not the peculiarly straight sides of the narrow hole caught my attention and made me pause. Why was the hole there at all? And why was it so straight and square, and exactly like a—a—I didn't like to bring the word out, even to myself—like a grave? It had been recently dug, too. The spade still lay at the side, and the pile of earth that had been taken out was still damp and wet to the touch, though there had not been rain for weeks. A disagreeable thought or suspicion flashed on me; but I resolutely dismissed it. A curious creeping sensation, like the rising of my hair on end, came over me as I slowly felt the sides of the hole over with my hands; and then, with a quick spring, I got out of it, determined to see the end of the thing at once. I reached the ladder, took out one of the pistols I carried, cocked it, and placed it between my teeth, and then slowly began to mount to the roof. I got to the top, out of the deep shade, into the moonlight, and then saw that the hatch was open. But I saw more. There was a light inside, and the sound of some one moving. The moment my feet touched the slates the light went out. Still undaunted, and more curious than ever to see who was between the slates and the roof of the bedrooms at such an hour, I took out a dark lantern I carried, turned back the slide, and approached the hatch. I listened. Everything was still—deadly still—now. The glare of the lantern into the wide hatch showed the bare rafters within—nothing more. Still I had an unaccountable reluctance to dropping down inside. It was not fear, but a strange aversion.

"Anybody there?" I said at last.

The sound of my voice died away, but there was no answer.

I turned my feet round into the hole, and dropped down inside. Then all became blank. I must have been felled, I think, with something heavy, and on the head; for when I came to myself I was lying on the bare rafters, roped into helpless rigidity, with the blood oozing from a cut on my forehead, and the glare of my own lantern turned on my face. There was no other light; but a straight white strip of moonlight came in from the open hatch above, and fell on a face—a man's face—before me. The man was Jim Maclusky.

"Ah, you're not dead yet?" he said, with a savage grin. "You will be shortly; but I would not like you to go without knowing who sent you. I mean to kill you."

"What for?"

"Because I hate you, and we cannot both live," he hissed, waving the knife in his hand within an inch of my face. "The world is not big enough for us both, and I swore that night to kill you, though I swung for it the minute after. You hear?"

"I hear."

This was only partly true. I heard the sound of his voice, but all my attention was fixed on the open hatch above his head. I thought for a moment that a dark shadow crossed it and obscured the light.

"Well, I give you a minute—five minutes to prepare. Your funeral won't be numerously attended. I dug the grave myself, and I'm to be chief mourner. A good idea, wasn't it, to bury you in the garden of a respectable house at the Grange? They'll never look for you there; they'll be more apt to look out about Breezy Brae, beyond Merchiston."

"Ah! then, you sent that?"

"I did. There, now, don't trouble to open your mouth to shout, for these houses are so far apart that you'll never be heard. Are you mad? What the d—l is it you're always looking at behind me?"

He turned round, and then the shadow I had been watching sprang forward into the strip of moonlight and became a woman. A strong one, too, as it seemed, for she grasped him by the shoulders, hurled him aside, and defiantly took her place in front of my prostrate figure. Then he recognised her.

"Meenie! What do you want here?" he shouted, with a horrible oath.

"To save him."

"Are you mad?"

"I don't know whether I am or not," she said, in a tone that startled and chilled me by its very calmness. "Jim Mac-lusky, if you value your life, go away from here;" and she pointed to the open hatch with the knife she had wrenched from his hand.

"Woman, stand back, or I'll strangle you!"

He was preparing for a spring, but an imperious haughty rearing of the woman with the knife stopped him.

"Jim Mac-lusky," she hoarsely breathed, in the same fearful tones, "don't cross that strip of light. Don't do it—I warn you. I've seen it in my dreams, and there was always a bloody knife sticking through it."

"Do you take me for a fool? Stand back!" and with a

bound he was upon her, and had her by the hair before the words were out of his lips.

They struggled together, almost without a sound, for a few moments; and then I think the knife must have touched him, for he let go—only for a moment. He sprang forward with a yell of rage; but he never got across the strip of moonlight. Her hand went through it, knife and all; and when it came back it was red and reeking.

There was a great wild yell from him, and a scream from her; and then he went straight back, and flopped down, rigid and still on the bare rafters. The knife dropped from her hand, she stared about in a maze, and then slowly drew her hand across her brow. It left a red streak, and the wet feeling seemed to attract her attention.

"There is something wrong," she fearfully whispered. "Where am I? I dreamt that I saw the knife again—Jim's knife—all red like, and steaming. But they put the poor wee thing in the ground. He said he was sorry for it, too, because it was his own child. Oh! if he had only killed me instead, and let it live. It was so tender and young. I don't like to think of it. In the morning when I wake, I'll try to forget it."

She sat down, taking no notice of me, whether I spoke or not, and maundered on in this way till far on in the morning, when I managed to make myself heard by the policeman on the beat, who had the house broken open, and me released. Meenie was taken to the Office, when a stretcher was despatched for the body of Jim Maclusky; but she never spoke another sensible word. The Asylum for Pauper Lunatics received her a few days after, and there she remained till her death. Tony Brand emphatically denied all knowledge of the plot; and as we had a bad case in regard to proof, we detained him on another charge, upon which he was tried and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment. As to my affair, and the last of Maclusky, the papers gave a garbled account of it, under the title of a "Strange Stabbing Case at the Grange," and then the troublesome scoundrel *was*—fitting fate—forgotten.

WEE PUNCH, THE DOG DETECTIVE.

Two solitary characters stood in the midst of a continual hurry-scurry of bustling life. An odd pair they were, but closely linked together. The first was Anty Shaw, aged twelve, newspaper boy and public boot-black ; and the second was Wee Punch, his dog, constant attendant, and tout for customers. Punch was ugly—a regular “messin.” Some say he had a bit of the English terrier in him ; I think he had a little of the bull dog ; while others stoutly asserted that every known and unknown breed of dogs had contributed a drop of blood to his dwarfed and deformed little body. More : Punch wanted an ear—it was bitten clean off by the root ; and the snow and sleet dropped in, gathered and melted at its leisure. Punch’s tail was two inches of stump. But the stump had life—the supplest of jerkiness. At every word of Anty’s, the stump jerked an unqualified approval. If you had said to Anty that that dog did not understand every word and whisper that he addressed to it, Anty would have pitied you—yes, though you were the greatest of philosophers, or the most famous of men, he would have pitied you for your ignorance. The place was the Waverley Bridge, close to the railway station, and the time was very near the end of December. No one wanted a paper, and no one wanted their boots brushed ; so after a doubtful “*Scotsman, Courant, or Review, sir?*” delivered in the direction of a hurrying passenger, Anty propped his blacking-box against the pailings—the Market wasn’t built then,—sat down, and addressed Punch.

Anty was Irish ; though whether Punch was Irish too I have not the remotest idea. I daresay, if Punch himself had been asked the question, to please Anty he would have given a kind of doggish hint that he was Irish to the backbone—to the very end of his jerky stump.

“I’ve been thinking, Punch,” said Anty, with a slight sigh, and the merest trace of a tear in his eye, “I’ve been thinking that times are pretty hard.”

A cheerful twinkle of Punch's eyes and a demurring jerk of the stump was the reply. Punch didn't think so. For his part he had certainly seen worse. But Anty wouldn't be put off with the well-meant attempt to cheer him.

"Ah! but I mean to a fellow like me, that's got a large family to keep," he explained.

Punch looked a little graver—there certainly was some truth in that.

"Let me see :—there's Granny," pursued Anty, beginning to count on his fingers; "but then I can't count her one, for she's always pinching herself, that we may have more to eat. I know she does it, though she won't admit it. I'll call her a half, eh?"

Punch was highly pleased with the arrangement.

"Then there's Cissy; but she's younger than me, so she's only a half too. Why, that's only one yet," exclaimed Anty, quite delighted and surprised at the result of his counting.

Punch was delighted too—he rather thought it only came to a half altogether; but if Anty thought otherwise, good and well.

"Then there's little Pat, the darlin'; but then he's so weak and thin that it's very little we can get him to eat. Oh! I can't count him anything; so it's still only one."

Punch's eye and stump joyfully said, "So it is."

"Then there's me—ah! I count one. I eat an awful lot," continued Anty, saddening visibly, and allowing his voice to sink. "I think it's being so much in the open air does it. Granny says so, and she's always right. I wish there was something that poor folks could get for nothing that would make them eat less; I'd take some every morning, first thing, before I went for the papers. I try to eat little—I do indeed;" and he looked like it, for he was pretty thin, and not over robust.

Punch did not agree with the first part of this speech at all—appeared to think that there was a mis-statement in every line, and only regretted his inability to point them out.

"Then there's you, Punch," continued Anty, brightening a little; "but I can't count you anything, 'cause you pick up so much outside that you don't need much at home."

Punch didn't know much about that—he rather thought he was the greatest glutton of the lot. However, he was thankful for his master's good opinion.

"And then—sure, how could I forget that?—you work for your meat as hard—harder—than me. Aren't you always

running about among the people near me? an' don't they think you awful ugly—at first, you know, only at first? and then they laugh at you, and ask me questions about you; and then, when I point out your beauties, they see that you're no more ugly than little Patrick, and they generally buy a paper, or have their boots cleaned. Oh, you're my best friend—no mistake about it;" and Anty looked down with a firmness that brooked no contradiction.

Punch was overwhelmed, and barked with joy till the tears came into his eyes. The outer world stared at the insignificant atom of humanity, and the still more insignificant atom of a dog, enjoying themselves; but what did they care? They were a little world in themselves.

"Of course it would have been different if father and mother had lived," continued Anty, thoughtfully.

Punch's eyes said one word—"Rather!"

"But they told me not to look for fortunes anywhere but in my own ten fingers, and I suppose I'll find out some day that they were right;" and Anty sighed a little as he saw some grand coaches roll by, lined with furs and silks and all sorts of cosy things. "Only, Punch—only, I would like just one thing—if I could sell six dozen papers every day. That would be eighteenpence a-day; and p'raps six bootses to do, would make it two shillings. Twelve shillings a-week!—oh, wouldn't that be stunnin'!"

Punch gave one bark—a bark of superlative happiness.

"Let me see. Then I could buy that shawl for Granny. It's only three-and-six, and as good as if it had never been worn; and she does want one awful bad, and I could give it her on New-Year's Day! Oh!" and as his clasped hands came together, the prospect seemed almost to take his breath away.

Punch's breath wasn't taken away—oh, no! he showed that.

"But, ah! I'm afraid I'll never get that length," sighed Anty.

Punch barked again; but this time it was a warning; for a dark spirit, in the shape of Mike Morris, another merchant in the same line, had loomed up and seized him by the shoulder.

Times didn't seem to be hard with Mike; on the contrary, though he was not much older than Anty, he seemed to spend a deal of money, and also to have plenty more to spend. Anty had noted the fact, and wondered at it too. He disliked Mike, but tried to conceal his antipathy as much as possible.

"Hullo! who are ye talkin' to?" coarsely broke in Mike, speaking through the mouthful of candy he was munching.

"To Punch, of course," was the simple reply.

"The dog! Ho, ho! Oh, you fool!"

Anty knew the boy's ignorance, but said nothing. Punch showed his teeth.

"And what was ye talkin' about? I'd like to know that," derisively continued the new-comer.

"I was just saying that them was pretty hard times."

"Humph! times is pretty much as ye make them," said Mike Morris, with a cunning leer. "I never find them hard."

"No, but then you're lucky," responded Anty, with perfect simplicity. "If I was as lucky—oh! what a lot I could do for them that's dependin' on me!" and his limp figure swelled out and filled his thin blouse at the thought.

Mike looked at him for a moment or two without speaking.

"You're an awful simpleton," he said at last. "If it wasn't for that, I could put you up to a good thing. Have a bit?"

A lump of candy was held forth, and Anty took it with thanks—principally because he knew that Punch liked sweets, and that, after treating him to a bit, some would be left for little Pat at home.

"Something that would make one eat less?" inquired Anty, with deep interest.

"No, something better. Something that gives ye plenty to eat. Look at me: I've always plenty of everything, and can spend money when I like."

"Ah, that's true; but where do you get it?"

"That's the secret."

"Ah! of course;" and Anty's eager look faded into blankness. "Well, I'd give something to know that secret. I'd give—no, I wouldn't give Punch; I couldn't part with him for anything; but I'd give—well, I've nothing else to give, barrin' this old pocket-knife, and it's only worth a penny."

"Ah, but this secret's worth a good lot—it's a quick road to a fortune."

Anty looked at the rags, dirty face, tangled hair, and wolfish aspect of the boy before him, and thought that that was strange. But another objection came into his head.

"Ah! but my father used always to say them quick ways was bad ways," he said reflectively.

"Then your father was a—" A quick flush mounting Anty's cheek warned him just in time. "Was a—well, never mind; he didn't know this one, I'll swear."

"You might tell it me."

Anty did not know it, but he had a knack of asking a thing in a very nice, taking way; and Mike appeared to hesitate.

"Will you not tell any one if I do let you into it?"

"Never."

"Not though you see me do it?"

"No."

"You promise?"

"I promise. I never tell lies. I'll keep my word."

"Well, the secret is, to make one penny go as far as four--ten--p'raps twenty."

"Ay, but how's that done?" and Anty looked curious.

"Look here; I'm a fool for telling you; but here goes. You pay threeha'pence for two papers, don't ye?"

"Yes."

"An' sells them for tuppence, which is a ha'penny of profit. Now, suppose ye get the papers for nothing, it would be tuppence profit--ye see?"

"Yes, but where would ye get them for nothing?"

"At the shop, of course."

"No, they wouldn't give you them."

"No, but if you're sharp, you can take them."

"Do you do that?"

Anty appeared to see it now, for his face was blazing hot all at once.

"What's the matter with you? Of course I do."

"Then you're a low thief!"

Anty got the words out with a burst, though he was choking, and red to the roots of his hair, and at the same time tugged the candy from his pocket, and shoved it back upon the astonished Mike.

"There, take yer candy; I don't want it--nor you, nor anything belongin' ye; and don't speak to me again, nor come near me. Father always told me that keepin' company with a thief was as bad as bein' one yourself;" and Anty, having got all this out in a hurried, indignant burst, hastily snatched up his wallet of papers and blacking-box to get away from the spot.

Mike had a thick skull, but it was penetrable. The taunt touched him in the quick at last.

"Why, ye miserable, whining thief!" he cried out; "ye skinny, half-starved, poor-house beggar! Do ye dare to preach to me? Ho, ho, ho! Go an' be a 'prentice to Father Simms. Ugh!" and as Punch happened to be nearest, he gave it a cruel kick in the ribs.

The dog, small though it was, would have been at his legs and through his trousers with its teeth in a moment ; but Anty, trembling with indignation, caught it back, and laid down his box and wallet.

"Watch them, Punch, and don't you stir," he commanded, beginning to tug off his blouse. "Mike, you cruel brute ! what did you kick the poor dog for?"

"Dog ! Call that a dog," jeered the big-boned young ruffian, who saw he had touched Anty's most sensitive spot. "Ugh ! I wouldn't pick it off the street. I'm going to hang it some night, an' get the boys to kick its body about the gutters. Whish !" and he spat right into Anty's face.

Like lightning a little fist flew through the air at his face, and then they were at it. Two boys were fighting on Waverley Bridge, heedless of slush and snow, punching each other's heads, tugging, struggling, and wrestling. A morsel of a dog looked on, growling and showing its teeth, and never moving off the wallet of papers.

A crowd of boys gathered round, carefully looked after the caps of the combatants, and then, seeing how things were going, lent their voices to the winning side.

"Now, little 'un ! give it him ! That's right ! Another in the eye !—beautiful ! Don't let him get you down ! Well done, so !" and thus the thing went on.

Properly, I know, if size and muscle were considered, Mike should have come off victorious. But everybody knows that the incentive to a fight has often as much to do with the result as the strength of the fighters. Scotland's a little country, but it always came off victorious in the end. Anty was small, but there was such an unnatural strength in him at the moment, that he could have fought a man, far less a boy.

And so, after a kind of fierce dream of thumps, in which he fancied his own fists did some work, Anty found the boys patting him on the head, and helping him to put on his blouse and cap ; while Mike slunk off, drubbed, mauled, and thoroughly beaten.

"What began it?" one of Mike's friends asked, as he followed the young ruffian from the spot.

"He called me a thief," said Mike, with a look of fiendish hate back at the group round Anty ; "but it's him that's the thief. Wait a while, and see if I don't prove it."

Yes, boys are men in miniature, and one idea had taken possession of Mike's heavy brain—how to be revenged. He

could not punish Anty with his fists: could he not do it with his cunning? He would try.

A few days passed away, and as a first step he ingratiated himself again with Anty. He apologised, in a boy's way, for kicking Punch, and then explained that, as to the stealing of the papers, he had only been joking—merely trying Anty, because he knew that some of the boys did it, and wasn't sure but he might. Anty, generous and unsuspecting, readily forgave him, and they were better friends than ever. Not so with Punch. No cajoling, no flatteries, no presents could win the favour of the dog. Even a sweetie or a bit of candy was snapped up with a snarl or a growl. So long as Mike kept himself to himself, it took no notice of him; but if he tried to stroke it, or put a finger near it, a growl instantly warned him to desist. That was the position: now for the final stroke in the plot—though, of course, I learned it all afterwards, and in consequence of what followed.

One morning it happened that they had both to go to the wholesale news-agent's together, and on the way Mike cautiously sounded Anty on a certain point.

"Before we fought—d'ye mind?—you said you wouldn't tell on me if I stole anything."

"Ah! but I didn't know it was thieving ye meant then; besides, I said if I didn't see you do it. If I did, I'd peach quick enough. But ye wouldn't do that, would ye?"

"No, no—not I. But if ye knew that I did it, but didn't see me, would you peach then?"

Anty thought a moment, and then said, rather firmly—

"No."

"You're sure?"

"Quite."

"I know ye never tell lies, so I'll take you at your word," returned the young villain, and then the subject was dropped.

In the crush at the news-agent's they got separated. Mike was strong, and soon got to the front. Nearly as soon, and unseen in the hurry and bustle, he possessed himself of a dozen copies of the *Penny Post*. If any one saw the theft, they said nothing. The crime is a common one, as every wholesale agent's books will show, and neither glass covers nor broad counters seem a protection against it. Mike soon shoved his way out again, and at the outskirts of the crush found Anty.

"Just hold them papers for a minit, Anty," he said, proffering the dozen *Posts*. "Ye won't go away without me?"

"No, I can't till I get my papers."

"That's right;" and Mike disappeared with an elated look that Anty did not understand, but remembered afterwards.

Anty got to the front, still holding Mike's papers under his arm, and was about to give his own order, when some one near him asked for "half-a-dozen of the *Penny Post*." Without looking, the girl in attendance mechanically placed her hand where the dozen had been, and then uttered a cry as she found them gone.

"A dozen *Posts* stolen!" echoed along the shop; and in an instant a young lad nearer the door clambered over the counter and promptly closed the door.

"Search the boys; not a *Post* has been sold yet. Make them show their parcels. They can't be far off, for the parcel is newly opened," he cried; and every one in the nondescript crowd looked blankly and suspiciously at his neighbour.

"Well, you—what do you want?" Anty was asked, at the same moment from behind the counter.

"Six *Posts*," he promptly answered.

"What's that under your arm?" sharply asked the publisher, who was now himself on the spot.

"Oh, I got them from Mike to hold," he began. At the same moment he looked at them for the first time, and the word *Post*, in black letters, sent a sudden pang through his heart. He flushed crimson, and then turned deathly white, as the appalling truth flashed on him.

"I got them from Mike; he is here somewhere now," he piteously burst forth. "Oh, you surely couldn't think me a thief!"

He was seized in an instant, and every one looked for a person answering to the name of Mike; but, of course, no such person was to be found.

"You shameless young thief!" indignantly burst forth the publisher, who was anything but a harsh man naturally, but was simply not in possession of the real facts of the case—"you've done that trick once too often. Send for a policeman!"

"Oh, sir! I wouldn't steal a hap'worth though it was to save my life!" pleaded Anty, sinking on his knees. "Oh! whatever will become of Granny and them all if I'm taken up as a thief? Send for my granny, sir, and she'll tell ye that I'm honest, and that I wouldn't wrong a mouse—so I wouldn't."

"I daresay she will, but this is getting beyond endurance. We must make an example of you. Go for a policeman."

The shop lad turned to obey, and for a moment Anty was free. As the door was opened, he saw the free, fresh sunlight outside. The papers had been taken from him, and he was innocent of theft. If he were shut up in prison, some that he knew would starve. Could he not run for it?

No sooner thought than done. He was out, past the shop lad with a whisk, and flying faster through the air than he had ever dreamed of. There was a shout and a rush after him. He heard it ringing out behind him. Fear made him swift, but the shout made him swifter.

"Oh! if I could only see Granny, or hide somewhere!" he gasped to himself. "I never thought so many would turn against a poor boy. Granny would keep them off and save me if she were here; but she's not, and they're getting nearer, and I'll be caught, and then what'll become of them? They won't believe my word—oh-o-oh!"

Now at this time it happened that I, the writer of this book, was crossing the street near the spot, and seeing a rush of people, and hearing the cry, "A thief! a thief! a thief!" I, too, joined in the rush, and soon got near the cause of it. I saw a very small boy flying down the steep street, with an ugly little dog close to his heels. I saw his foot catch on the rough stones, and himself precipitated forward, cut, stunned, and bleeding, and moaning out the exclamation I have put at the end of his speech; and I was nearly the first to reach him. I raised him in my arms, and then found that he was senseless.

"Ha! that's him! hold him fast! Oh! that's a fief-catcher; he'll no get off now. Look at his heid bluidin' Ah! he's in for sixty days now!" were some of the comments that showered down all around me.

"What has he stolen?" I asked, feeling a touch of pity for the poor boy hanging over my arm so white and ghastly.

"A watch. No, it was a watch and chain. No, it was a purse; he's thrown it away;" and a number of other contradictory statements came from every side, and then someone said, "Oh, here's the man;" and the young shop lad elbowed his way into the crowd.

"A dozen papers," he said. "You better take him to the Office. Master sent me for a policeman, but he bolted before I got out of the shop."

"And where are the papers?" I asked. "I don't see any."

"Oh! they're in the shop; we took them from him. I can go for them, if you want them."

"Most certainly I do, if I'm to take him. But do you think your master will give him in charge for such a trifle? A good thrashing would be the best thing; indeed, he seems sufficiently punished already."

"Ah! but he has done us so often in the same way that we're only too glad to catch him at it," was the reply, and there was nothing for me but to obey.

I carried Anty back to the shop, where he was duly given in charge, and the dozen papers handed over to me; and then, after he had been brought back to consciousness, he was able in a feeble way to walk to the Office, holding on and supporting himself by my arm. He was very white, and cried bitterly because every one looked at him as if he were a thief; and the dog at our heels cried too—real genuine tears, that ran down its nose as it trotted whining along. As we reached the Police Office, Anty tugged my arm a little, and I stopped before entering the wide pend.

"If you please, sir, do you think they'll let Punch into the jail with me—that's the dog there?" he asked. "Oh, sir! I'm not a thief—indeed I'm not, I'm very honest. Father Simms said so the other day when he met me in the street; but I know they won't believe me, and I'll have to suffer; but if you let Punch go in with me, he'll keep me company till I get out again;" and both their tearful gazes were fixed eagerly on my face.

"Did Father Simms really say you were honest?" I asked, with sudden interest.

"Yes, he did indeed, sir; he'll say so to you."

"Ah, I'll see Father Simms, for he's not a man to speak rashly. But I'm afraid you must leave the dog outside; it's against the rule to have dogs in the place except when they're to be shot."

These last words made Anty snatch the dog up in his arms and hug it tight, while his tears rained down on its nose.

"Ah, Punch—poor wee Punch!" he chokingly got out. "I'm caught now, though I've done nothing, and they'll put me in prison, and p'raps Granny and the children will all be dead before I get out again. But listen, now: Mike did it all."

Punch appeared to prick up his one ear.

"Ah! I see you understand," hurriedly continued Anty, fervently kissing Punch's nose. "Mike must have stolen the papers, and then he gave them to me to hold. Go and search him out—do you hear! Catch Mike! Now, good—good-bye."

He laid it down, and then Punch trotted through the astonished crowd and disappeared, while Anty had such a burst of grief that I had to support him up the wide stairs into the Office. There was something so singular in his whole demeanour, and he was altogether so unlike the ragamuffin thieves that pass through our hands every week, that I was a little dubious about having him locked up before I had informed his friends and consulted Father Simms, whose opinion I did not undervalue because our creeds happened to differ. Still more dubious was I when I had drawn from him the facts already related. The story agreed so well in every detail that I began to look upon the white shivering boy as the victim of a cunning plot.

But at that juncture something settled the thing for me. Anty had complained of his head all along, and now his look of real illness attracted even my attention.

"It's my head, sir, it pains me so badly, and it seems to turn round," he said, beginning to grope about. "If you please, would you just let me lie down on the floor till it settles? If Granny was here, she'd hold my head in her hands. You might hold my hand, sir; I think I'm going to fall—"

I caught him in my arms as he fainted, and then carried him to a bed, where he was immediately seen and attended to by the medical officer. But he got worse, and by the time his Granny arrived he was half-delirious, and only knew her at intervals. But he spoke of her constantly.

"Oh, Granny!" he would moan, "I didn't steal them!—you know I wouldn't be a thief. Before I'd wrong anybody of a farthing, I'd sooner die! Granny, granny, granny! save me from the police! Save me! they're after me! Oh, I'll be caught, and then what'll become of you and the children? Oh-o-oh!"

But while all this was taking place, and I was slowly getting at the truth of everything, and finishing with a visit to the good priest Anty had named, where was Punch? Not at home, certainly, for the Granny, now chafing Anty's hot temples, had not as much as seen it. Nobody knew where it had gone. Well, yes—I'm wrong there; there was one who did know, and that one was—Mike Morris.

Now, do not think that I intend to exalt the dog to the level of a reasoning creature. What Anty might have thought of the thing I am about to relate was one thing; what the reader chooses to think may be quite another. For my part, I will take up a safe position, by merely giving the facts.

Mike Morris, of course, heard of the complete success of his plot ; but he heard no more. He did not hear, for instance, that Anty had not concealed his name, despite the cunning promise he had extracted from him ; nor could he hear that I was gradually getting at facts that were extremely likely to endanger his liberty. He got back to Waverley Bridge, and strutted and bounced in full feather. By and by he noticed that Anty's dog, Punch, was following at his heels. It made no demonstrations of joy, humbleness, or good feeling towards him—it followed him, that was all. Still, he was thick-headed enough to feel flattered at the attention. It had never done so before.

“Anty'll be a good while in,” he thought. “I'll stick to that dog, and when he comes out he'll whistle a long time before he gets it.”

Of course, it never struck him that the dog might stick to him—closer than he expected or wished. But he had no papers, and boots to brush came at very wide intervals.

“I'll go down an' get some,” he resolved ; “and if I can nail a few at the same time, it'll be all the better. They'll be all the easier done, seein' that they've caught the thief—ha, ha, ha ! that's funny. I can't help laughing, so I can't.”

He went, and Punch kept close to his heels every inch of the way. I don't know whether Punch thought, or was capable of thinking, but this I'll say, if a dog can think, Punch was thinking then—thinking of a duty he had to perform, a duty he owed to his master, to himself, and to society at large. Meanwhile, the clever young thief (all thieves think themselves clever till the end comes, and then they find they've made a mistake) walked on and reached the wholesale agent's. Beautiful ! The first glance showed him a most welcome state of affairs. Some new parcels had arrived and been opened, and odd lots were lying here, there, and everywhere, above the glass case. The shouting, crushing, and fighting were delightfully favourable to the efforts of—of—well, we'll call it genius ; and Mike very nimbly possessed himself of half-a-dozen Glasgow papers, and then sidled for the door. But now an inexorable avenger was on his track—not a policeman, not a detective, but quite as efficient a thief-catcher as either of the two. Just as he was reaching the door, there was a growl and a fierce snap, and Punch's teeth had gone through his trousers and nearly met in the calf of his leg !

A frightful yell burst from him, and instantly attracted all

eyes to the spot. The papers dropping from his grasp instantly revealed the theft, and he was collared at once, treated to a hearty kicking, and then hustled off to the Police Office. Punch followed the crowd all the way, not crying this time, but trotting along with a demure and business-like expression of satisfaction; and only when Mike tried to give it a lounging kick with the leg that didn't limp, giving vent to a bark of defiance. When Mike was brought in and asked his name, I happened to be in the room.

"Ah! indeed; you've come just in time. I was just going to look for you," I said, as he sullenly gave his name. "It's all right; I have a case against him. Lock him up."

If Punch could have spoken, of course we would have taken down his evidence, and had him for a witness; but though he had done remarkably well, he was only a dog after all, and when spoken to, only wagged his stumpy tail and went sniffing about the room; so we did the next best thing in our power—we took him into the room where Anty lay. There he had a great jumping match till he got up on the bed to Anty's fevered face, which he licked all over; and then he got down and curled himself up in a corner to watch for his recovery. This came about in less than a week; and as the other evidence was supplemented by Mike's confession, Anty was borne off in triumph by his Granny, with Punch barking joyously at his heels, while Mike went to prison for thirty days, and thence to a Reformatory for five years.

But Anty's case had attracted some attention, and created considerable interest; and with a little trouble and a trifling outlay, a little shop was taken in the Canongate—ostensibly in the name of Anty's granny, but in reality for him; and then Anty began life as an Edinburgh tradesman. The shop thrived in his hands, for he was a most diligent wee man of business, and kept at it from earliest dawn till late at night; and now that his granny is dead, and the "children" doing for themselves, he is actually thinking of getting married! Fancy that!

And Punch—what about him? Well, I grieve to say it; but facts must come out. Punch is dead too. But though he is dead, his memory still lives—like that of all who do a good action; and I hope I have here done something to brighten it.

Perhaps Anty will sell this over his counter—indeed, I am pretty sure he will; but if he does, I know there will be a tear in his eye to the memory of Wee Punch. When you and I are gone, I hope we may earn the same.

THE GHOST OF THE RING.

I HAVE no belief in ghosts, or sympathy with stories of mystical appearances, supernatural visitations, warnings, and so forth. I consider that the man who either invents or exaggerates such stories, and then promulgates them, commits a crime. He becomes one of that innumerable host of agencies tugging man back from light and freedom. Whenever a writer finds himself wandering in the regions of mysticism and morbid superstition, I would have him look to himself—he is in a dangerous state, and likely to do mischief to himself and to thousands of others.

Still, I have no wish to be dogmatic: if others believe in such things they are welcome. I do not sneer at the belief. I simply have to speak for myself before giving the following case. I am a little doubtful about some extraordinary dreams, but about ghosts I have no doubt whatever: I neither believe, nor wish to believe in them. “Then why give a ghost story yourself?” some one asks. I give it because the case was put before me in a romantic light that at first both staggered and fascinated me. Whether this feeling continued and remained the reader will soon judge.

“Captain Lindsay presents his compliments to Mr M’Govan, and would be greatly obliged if the Detective would send him his private address, and state at what hour he could see him, to consult privately concerning an important matter which he wishes kept secret.

“*Faulding House, G— Loan,*
“August 21, 18—”

The wording of the above note—which was handed to me at the Office—roused my curiosity; and I immediately complied with the request, arranging to see the Captain that afternoon at my own house. By a few inquiries I learned that he was a quiet, retired gentleman, a widower, without children, and had a passion for flowers, and great taste in gardening; but these facts gave me no clue as to his probable business with me.

He came, punctual to a minute, at the hour I had named; and then I found him to be an easy, accomplished gentleman of forty or so, with an utter absence of military stiffness or fashionable formality.

No time was lost. He began his business at once; but he began it in a queer way.

"I have heard that you are a little above the common run of detectives," he said. "I mean that, besides the astuteness necessary for your profession, you have some education."

"No, I never had the chance. What I know is all in scraps, just as I have picked it up," I replied. "You have been misled there."

"Ah! well, scraps will do. We need not dispute the point," he promptly returned. "I want you to converse with me for a few minutes on any subject that you yourself may choose. You open your eyes, and I don't wonder at it; but I have a reason for the request. Do you agree? or have you not the time to spare at present?"

"I have exactly one hour."

"Less will do—much less at present."

"Then I agree, if it is necessary to your business."

We rattled over a number of topics; and very soon his brilliant intelligence and deep knowledge made me feel very small indeed. In thinking of this, I had forgotten about his errand; but suddenly he drew up with the words—

"Now, do you know why I asked you to talk with me a while before mentioning my business?"

"No. Why?"

"I did it to see if you thought me mad."

"Mad?" I almost started from my chair as I echoed the word.

"Yes. Honestly, now, do you think you discover in me the slightest indication of a mind unhinged or diseased?"

"A medical man would be a better judge; but honestly I do not."

"Good. I thought so myself. Now for my business. Do you believe in ghosts?"

"No." I spoke emphatically, as I thought and felt.

"Ha! better. Neither do I. Stay, I should say, neither did I; for now I am haunted."

"Indeed! by what or whom?"

"You shall hear. But first I may tell you that, in spite of my robust appearance, I am subject to palpitation of the heart

and have been warned by my medical man that any undue excitement or violent exertion might prove fatal; you will therefore understand the concern this thing has given me, and my anxiety to have it cleared up."

I bowed and quietly waited to hear more. He extended his left hand, on which glistened and shone a ring of curious workmanship and resplendent beauty. It had two stones—a ruby and a diamond, and these were set into each other, and cut so as to resemble a round glittering eye—like that of a serpent or a snake.

"Do you see that ring?" he said.

I both saw it and admired it.

"Well, that ring I cut from the finger of a dead nabob during the rebellion in India, and it is the ghost of that nabob that now haunts me."

Here was a romance! and I was into the heart of it in a moment. But it did not upset me. Prepared to look upon the whole as a mere matter of business, without a vestige of the supernatural in it, I merely determined to make sure of every step as I advanced to its unravelment.

"One moment here," I interposed. "Is it not against your military laws to appropriate jewels or treasure in this way?"

"It is; but the thing is done, and even winked at, notwithstanding. The jewel took my fancy, and I stretched a point to possess it."

"Does any one else know how and where you obtained it?"

"Oh, yes—dozens. Such things are no secret among officers—or common soldiers either, for that matter. My own servant was with me when I discovered the gem. He could not get the ring off, and it was necessary to remove the finger. I stood over him during the process. I am not superstitious, but I distinctly remember noticing, that as the thing was done, the dark brow of the Hindoo seemed to pucker forward into an angry frown which for a moment gave a ghastly fierceness to his stony eyes. There were other bodies lying about; I had to pick my way through them nearly all the way to the camp; but the last look of this one haunted me for some days. I slightly regretted the action even then: now I would give a good deal that it were undone."

"I see; you are naturally sensitive. Now for the ghost. When did it first appear?"

"I saw it first in a dream, about a year after my return from India."

"Did you mention the circumstance to any one?"

"I scarcely think I did. I may have mentioned it to my servant—the only person likely to be interested in it; certainly to no one else."

"How did it look?"

"Mournful, restless, and wringing its hands in grief. It was dressed exactly as I saw it on the field after the skirmish. The dress was of white silk, bound with red and fastened at the waist with a crimson sash. The head was uncovered, and the long black hair falling down over the shoulders formed a vivid contrast to the shiny white material of the dress."

"Well, that was a dream. Now for the reality. When did the ghost proper appear—I mean to your genuine, waking senses?"

"Three weeks ago to-night. This is Friday, and I wish you to note that it was on a Friday that the skirmish occurred when I became possessed of the ring."

"Of course it appeared at midnight?"

"Not exactly—at least to my knowledge, for at that time I was sound asleep. Something must have roused me. I sleep but lightly, and the least rustle or noise would have done that. My bedroom is at the back, and on the ground floor. I chose it there because the window is the largest in the house, and looks to the east. I always sleep with the blind up, that I may get the full benefit of the morning sun. Well, I woke, as I have said, and with a start, for I was sitting bolt upright in bed and staring straight at the window when I came to myself. There was no moon, but it was very clear, and the stars were all out. What I saw, I saw distinctly, and I wish you to understand that I sprang out of bed to make sure that I was awake. About a couple of yards from the window, as near as I can guess, stood the spectre of this Hindoo. From where I stood the head, shoulders, and arms, nearly to the waist, were visible; the eyes were fixed reproachfully upon me; the face was convulsed, half in wrath and half in grief; and the hands, as in my dream, were wrung restlessly and persistently. How long I gazed at it I cannot tell. I was rooted to the spot. But as it slowly glided out of sight, I am ashamed to say that the shock was too much for me, and I fell down in a swoon. I had fainted like a woman."

"Did any one else see the spectre?"

"Not then—that I know of. I was ill for three or four days after; but though the doctor saw that I had received a

shock, I was ashamed to give him the details. When I recovered I found the servants moody, reserved, and continually conversing in whispers. I suspected the cause, but said nothing. My only dread was for the coming Friday."

I smiled—nay, grinned suits the thing better.

"Then you were sure it would come again on the same night, or rather morning?" I said, inquiringly.

"I was not sure—I merely feared it. Your scepticism does not displease me; I rather like it than otherwise, for my own reason would fain point in the same direction. The Friday night came, and, for the sake of appearances, I went to bed at the usual hour. To make sure of no optical deception, I not only kept the blind up, but raised the lower sash of the window. Of course sleep was a thing I did not dream of. I placed a loaded pistol ready on the counterpane, and lay down with my eyes fixed on the open window and lawn beyond. I must have dozed over at last into a light slumber, but a rustle outside roused me. There was a little moonlight this time, and there! in the feeble light, stood the spectre!"

The perspiration stood on the brow of my visitor at the recollection, and he was becoming painfully white. I handed him a glass of water, and in a minute he resumed—

"There was no difference in the appearance. The outline of the figure was shiny against the light of the young moon, but owing to the light coming from behind, I could not so well distinguish the dark features. It slowly raised the right hand, and in Hindostanee whispered the words—'Plunderer, beware the third!'"

"Did you make any reply?"

"No; I sharply raised my right hand, and instantly fired at it, point blank."

"Did you hit it?"

"No; the smoke cleared away, and there it stood, showing every white tooth in a contemptuous smile. I am considered an excellent shot, and could not possibly have missed it had it been a man. The sight was too much for me. I groped to get out of bed; a sudden tearing at my heart seemed to send me sinking downwards, and I remember no more till I found myself in bed, nearly twelve hours after, with the doctor at my side."

"You are not well yet," I said, with some sympathy for his agitation. "You ought not to have come out. Why did you not send for me?"

"Because the secret might ooze out. Already all the servants but one have given warning. They complain of ghostly voices, footsteps, and rustlings about the place. If the thing is a clever juggle, it must be crushed at once."

"Did you load the pistol yourself—carefully and with ball?"

"Yes—no; I believe it was loaded by my old body servant, months ago. I used to practise at the end of the garden; but I have not touched the weapon for months."

"Then, that is one point gained: you are not certain that you were not firing a blank shot. It's a pity you did not get some one—this body servant, for instance—to watch with you. Two would have made certain that it was no optical delusion, and an old soldier would have been just the man for such a task."

"True; but he is no longer with me. When I sold out and came home, at his request I bought his discharge, and brought him with me; but, poor fellow, he took to drinking hard, and we had to part."

"Indeed! Was this the same man who helped you to the dead nabob's ring?" I asked, with some interest.

"The same."

"Had you any quarrel over the separation?"

"Some very high words, and bitter reflections on his part as to throwing away his chance of a pension for me; but I had really borne with him till I could bear no longer."

"When did this occur?"

"About two months ago; but he had saved a good bit of money out there, and I regret to say he has done nothing but drink, drink ever since. I saw him about a month ago, down near Holyrood. He stopped me, and then we had a quarrel in earnest. I said he was a disgrace to the name of a soldier. He tried to strike me then, saying there was no longer any dread of the lash; but I threw him off sharply. Unluckily his head caught some iron railings behind and got badly cut. He would not let me touch the wound, but said he would pay me back for all, and then staggered off."

"I am glad you mentioned this. I think the mystery may not turn out so unfathomable as you are disposed to imagine."

"Do you really think so?" he quickly responded with evident relief, and a general brightening of his whole aspect. "If I could only catch your spirit, it would take a deadly weight off my mind. By the doctor's advices and hints I can see that he considers my brain affected. Now, I know that it is not.

But you must admit that it is a very different thing talking about such matters here in the broad daylight, with the sun shining on us, from facing the thing alone in the stillness of the night."

"Yet, that is just where you erred ; but if you commit the whole thing to me, the mistake shall not be repeated. I will watch with you."

"You will?" he joyfully and eagerly returned. "It is the very favour I should have asked. You do not, then, believe that the apparition was really the spirit of the Hindoo?"

"I certainly do not. In dreams the living may in some mysterious way affect us—though I am even doubtful of that ; but the dead?—no, I cannot believe it. You have been duped in some clever way—perhaps by some one having a knowledge of your delicate health, and cruelly anticipating an evil result from the fright. Now, listen. This is Friday ; and your whole manner tells me that you fear a return to-night of your romantic spectre. It will be the wonderful "third time," and your fears hint that it may be your last night on earth. Now here are two pistols," and I took them from a drawer as I spoke. "They are not, perhaps, such fancy articles as yours ; but I can assure you they never miss fire. Indeed, I took them from a criminal who meant business with them ; and had they been useless he would never have carried them. I will load them before you ; and to-night you shall use one, and I the other. I am not, like you, a practised hand with them—only keeping them for self-defence, or for frightening criminals in an emergency ; but, between us, if your hand does not fail, I daresay we may send a ball through your impalpable spectre. If he is still impervious, I will use my legs and hands in a chase and grapple, and I will take care that some one else is there to second me. Do you agree?"

"Agree!" he warmly echoed, grasping my hand. "How can I express my thanks?"

"By lending me your wits in laying bare the swindle. I do not think the conspirator is on the premises, but it is as well to provide against every emergency, by keeping our every movement secret. Could you get rid of your domestics in any way for an hour or two to-night, while I inspect the premises and make arrangements?"

"I don't know. Would it do to send them to the theatre?"

"The very thing—a good idea."

"Then it shall be done. I will send them all, except my

housekeeper ; and as she is my foster-mother, I can trust her with my very life."

"Then what time shall we say? There is no need for coming too soon. Nine?"

"Very good. Nine be it."

"Just one thing more," I added, as he rose to go. My companion will be a detective called M'Sweeny. Will you be good enough not to mention such a thing as a ghost in his presence? Speak of it as a man, a trickster, a masquerading fool, or anything else that may suit your fancy, but not on any account as an apparition or spirit."

This Captain Lindsay very readily agreed to, and then he took his departure, while I got back to the Office and asked M'Sweeny to assist me in the capture of a madman, who fancied that he was Nana Sahib, the author of the Cawnpore atrocities. It was the only plan I could think of to provide against his inherent fear of ghosts. He agreed with great alacrity.

"Nana Sahib!" he echoed, with a knowing wink. "Sure, it's good company I'm going into anyhow."

"Yes ; p'raps better than you imagine," was my inward reflection.

"I wish it was the real one. I'd pitch into him first, an' then take all his jewels an' gold. But mightn't I give him just a bit of a thump for his namesake?"

"Better catch him first, and then we'll decide. It is just possible, you know, that he may be very nimble."

"Nimble ! if he wor as nimble as my grandfather's ghost, who tuck the Gap of Dunloe at one lape, I'd ketch him if I got me eyes on him."

"Yes ; but suppose he ketches you?"

"Then I'll howld on to him, like a barnacle to a shlippery rock."

"Good ; and if he runs?"

"Then he'll carry me wid him."

"Like old Nick running away with the exciseman?"

"Ha, ha ! that's good," he laughed.

"It is good, if you only knew it—ha, ha, ha, ha !" and then we both laughed—he at one thing and I at another.

Sharp upon nine that night, M'Sweeny and I got to Faulding House, and were admitted by the housekeeper, whose joy at seeing us was only outdone by that of the Captain himself, who received us with great hospitality and kindness. All the

other servants, we learned, had been without difficulty smuggled off to the theatre, and we had the clear run of the whole place for two hours at least.

Inspecting the premises, and carefully examining every outlet both to garden and house, swallowed nearly an hour, and then we settled to arrange a plan of capture. Here, however, I may admit that I made one oversight or miscalculation. The ghost, so far as Captain Lindsay was aware, had always appeared outside the building, and, of course, it never struck me that upon this occasion it might change its tactics. Thus it happened that no unusual fastenings were attached to the two doors leading into the garden, one of which simply closed with a spring latch, and could be opened from without by any one possessed of a properly fitting key.

M'Sweeney's hiding-place we had some difficulty in fixing upon, for I wished it not only to be outside, but near the window of the Captain's bedroom. A high wooden tank stood near the spot; but though it had been dry for years, it was not only filled with rubbish in the shape of gardening stakes, broken tools, stumps, and dead wood, but was much too high for a convenient and quick scramble out. No other place suggested itself, however; so we got a pair of steps, and, with some sweating and hard work, cleared a sufficient space for his large frame, and there left him, after clearing away the rubbish and removing the steps.

"I can lape, never fear," he said, looking over the edge of the cistern and down at us; "and if Nana Sahib only passes this way, I'll be down on him like winking. But I saw ye loadin' pistols. Where's mine? This 'ud be a mighty good place for aisy shooting."

"Didn't I tell you to bring your staff?"

"Yes, here it is."

"Well, that's your pistol."

"Very good; and when that's fired, there's plenty more here beside me;" and he brought up a heavy billet of wood, and exultantly showed it over the edge of the tank. "If Nana gets that on his head he won't ax for more."

"Ah, but no violence mind, unless it's absolutely necessary."

"Och! never fear; I'll be as gentle as a rat-trap wid the teeth wrapped in velvet;" and with that his head disappeared, and we re-entered the house.

I followed the Captain to his bedroom, and soon fixed upon my own place of concealment. I may explain that this room

had two doors—one leading by a narrow passage to the door into the garden, and the other, opposite, leading into the main lobby of the house. Opposite the window stood a large wardrobe; and it so happened, that after I had ensconced myself in this, leaving the doors about two inches ajar, I had a full view of both these doors, as well as of the great window facing me. As soon as all this had been arranged, Captain Lindsay struck a light, threw up the lower sash of the window, brought some books, and sat down to read. The suggestion was my own; for if it happened that eyes were fixed upon that window from without, his figure could be clearly distinguished by the bright light, and it would be seen that he was calmly following his usual practice before retiring to rest. By and by I could hear the carriage drive up to the front of the house, and the servants getting out and dispersing through the building. Then I saw the coachman, away down at the stables behind, putting away the carriage and rubbing down the horse; but very soon the twinkling light went out, his footsteps died away, and silence gradually fell on the whole place.

Captain Lindsay read on, steadily and unflinchingly, without once speaking to me or looking near my hiding-place, till close upon twelve, and then he deliberately undressed, extinguished the light, and got into bed. The silence soon became oppressive, and it did not surprise me that the captain had on the last occasion fallen into a slumber. The moon rose clear and full, and its light came in on the bed in a broad sheet, and I could see that this time the occupant was both wide awake and keenly on the alert. His eyes never closed for a moment. The right hand, holding my pistol for readiness and convenience, lay outside the counterpane. Had I been lying instead of standing I must have inevitably fallen asleep; but perhaps the Captain had excitement to keep him awake, while I had only deep interest. How M'Sweeny got on among the faggots in the tank I cannot tell. My private opinion is that at first he slept. About two o'clock there was a disturbance of the heavy stillness—a kind of rustle, accompanied by a soft footfall, and the Captain raised his head, strained his eyes in the direction of the window, and listened intently. I felt my own pulse quicken as the sounds approached. Suddenly, and I must say quite unexpectedly, one of the doors of the room noiselessly opened, and a tall figure in Eastern garb, with Turkish trousers and pointed shoes to match, stalked deliberately across the room, wringing its hands and keeping its eyes fixed on the bed.

Captain Lindsay appeared completely fascinated—paralysed,—and stared at it with widely-distended eyes, without even moving a finger. Even I was taken aback, and never thought of the pistol in my hand till the thing had crossed the broad sheet of moonlight and vanished through the opposite door. A moment after, I had recovered myself.

“Stay there—do not move!” I whispered, as I flew across the room and through the open door.

But the wide lobby was pitch dark ; and after fruitlessly groping for some time, and hearing neither footsteps nor any sounds but those I myself was making, I floundered back to the bedroom for a light.

“Why did you not fire?” whispered the Captain, pale with excitement. “I could not have moved though it had been to save my life.”

“I don’t know. I did not expect it from the door,” I hurriedly returned. “Besides, it might almost be murder. I’m afraid it’s a man.”

“Why do you think so?”

“Because it did not glide after the approved fashion, but walked—deliberate, regular strides. Sh-s-h ! what’s that? I hear it again, or something like it, outside.”

“Look ! look !” gasped Captain Lindsay, pointing to the window.

I did look, and there was the apparition again ! The same paralysing effect followed its appearance !—we both stood staring at it as if petrified. For a moment it stood wringing its hands, as before ; then the right hand was slowly raised, the eyes fixed themselves piercingly upon Captain Lindsay, and the lips slowly began to pronounce some words in a foreign tongue, which made the Captain shrink and shrink, as if about to expire on the spot. But there came a sudden interruption. There was a sound from the direction of the tank outside of some one stirring ; and with a sudden “whizz,” a heavy block of wood flew through the air with unerring aim, and caught the ghost on the back of the head, causing it to bow sharply and utter a cry of pain. As it did so, the long black hair tumbled from the head in a disordered heap—it was a wig ! Captain Lindsay sprang up, as if endowed with new life, the moment M’Sweeny’s triumphant whoop struck on his ear, and before I could intervene he had raised his right arm and fired. The ghost had started forward with a rush ; but mingled with the report came another sharp cry of pain ; and then I was through

smoke and window with one bound, and after it like the wind, while M'Sweeny leaped down and cut down the other walk, abjuring it in Irish Gaelic "to stop, or it would be worse for it." But the ghost either did not understand the language, or felt no inclination to obey. It ran—half stooping, and holding one arm tightly above the elbow—straight across the lawn towards a well-trimmed hedge, which separated it from the garden beyond. Feeling sure of our prisoner now, M'Sweeny and I left the walk on either side to close in on the fugitive. But no. With one great flying leap it went clean over. It was as neat a jump as I ever beheld—the feet well doubled up below, and not the slightest trace of an effort visible. To "follow suit" was a little beyond our powers, so we dashed back to the walk, with an imprecation at our own stupidity. But the moment's delay had given it a start, and with a shout we redoubled our efforts as we saw it near a wooden door in the garden wall. This door was ajar too; so there was no need of any display of ghostly skill in slipping through keyholes; and I gave our prisoner, who ran wonderfully like a powerful man, up for lost. Here, however, accident stepped in and saved us a deal of trouble. The feet of the fugitive tripped on something, and one hand being occupied in holding the other arm, down he rolled in the dirt, with a heavy thud, groaned for a moment, and then lay perfectly still. The ghost had fainted. We picked him up—a warm, breathing, bleeding man—and carried him between us towards the house. Half-way we were met by Captain Lindsay, with some of the roused servants bearing lights; and we soon had our prisoner stretched out in the hall, surrounded by a wondering, shuddering group. I took a candle from one of them, and, motioning to Captain Lindsay to approach, placed it close to the face of the wounded man.

"Now take a good look at your ghost, Captain," I said, "and tell me if you know him."

The face of the senseless man was done up with Spanish brown, the moustache and beard had been shaved off, and, moreover, the eyes were closed; so it is no wonder that for some moments the Captain was in doubt. M'Sweeny poured a tumbler of water on the face. I wiped it white. The man groaned, writhed, and opened his eyes; and then the Captain knew him, and started right back at the discovery.

"Why! good God! it is Parks!"

"Your old body servant!"

"Yes. Well, if that isn't the strangest thing I ever heard of! What on earth could prompt him to it?"

"Fancied wrongs, probably. He has paid dearly for it, though. I'm afraid your shot caught him in the arm. Take off the dress; it's real silk, too; I wonder where he got it?"

"Stripped from the dead. I see it all now," returned the Captain. Well, I would give anything that it were undone;" and he looked like it, for he stooped down and tried to raise the man in his arms.

The face of the wounded old soldier was convulsed with agony, and he could scarcely speak; but he managed to struggle backwards, with his eyes fixed in deep hate on the face of the man he had once served so faithfully, and groaned out—

"Away! keep—off!"

"I'm afraid, Captain, that your pity is misplaced," I ventured to remark. "Remember that this trick of his might have cost you your life, and might have done incalculable mischief as well. In intent he was a murderer; and, in my opinion, for such a contemptible trickster no punishment can be too severe. He has taken advantage of your former confidence, combined with his knowledge of the premises, to plot against your life. Chance has decreed that, instead of a mysterious and fatal ghost story, there is only an ingenious piece of masquerading to relate; but the result might have been very different, and he must suffer accordingly."

These were my words; but it took a deal more talking to convince the Captain of their soundness. At last, however, he consented to the removal of Parks to the Office in our custody, and ordered out the carriage for the purpose. Beyond uttering the three words I have recorded, the wounded man never opened his lips. We took him to the Office, where his arm was dressed; but the bone had been badly shattered, and next day, after a consultation, he was removed to the Infirmary, where, before night, it was deemed necessary to amputate the disabled limb a little below the shoulder. As soon as he was sufficiently recovered, he was arraigned for playing the ghost, "with intent to do grievous bodily harm." To make sure of having a hold of him, the indictment had to be very carefully and nicely worded; but the ingenious defence set up for him almost threw the whole to the winds. The plea was that he had been suffering from *delirium tremens*, and consequently was not responsible for his actions. The judge and jury, however, did not quite see it in that light; but as the principal

sufferer, Captain Lindsay, had spoken strongly in his favour, the mitigated punishment of six months' imprisonment was awarded.

One curious fact I must state. The very day that Parks' term expired, Captain Lindsay's carriage was in waiting to receive him and convey him to Faulding House, in which he served faithfully **and** honourably till his death, four **years** after.

THE STORY OF A BULLET.

HERE is one of the most singular cases of long-looked-for revenge that ever came under my notice. Hastily glanced at there may appear a kind of blind justice about the vicious passion as here displayed, which impression vanishes only when the whole is tested by the higher rules of life and religion. No wrongs however great, or oaths however solemn, can justify deliberate murder, which seems to me the most horrible crime that ever stained this fair earth, and one for which the severest penalty ever inflicted falls far short of atonement.

One evening in September, Tom Prowl, principal gamekeeper on the B—— estate, leisurely took his way out of the east end of the notable little town of D——, about six miles from Edinburgh. He was a great, powerful man, not ill-looking, and a little under thirty; and he had a reputation for a savage ferocity and recklessness in dealing with poachers that kept his employer's grounds more free of these marauders than if he had employed a dozen watchmen. He was a cruel, unflinching, daring man, and strode the earth with the tread of a giant; but I may at once let out the secret of his great efficiency—he himself, ten years before, had been one of the most daring poachers infesting the district. There was even a dark cloud on his name, which old poachers spoke of with ominous shakes of the head; but since he had been away in America for more than seven years, the rumour had died out and been forgotten. Forgotten, did I say? Well, it was by all but one. Certainly, if the old poachers could have substantiated the rumour by proving that Prowl was the murderer of Old Malcolm, the gamekeeper, they would gladly have done so, if only to get rid of the brute. But they could not, and were careful to remain silent, while outsiders set the whole story down as false. It may seem strange that a poacher, and one with such a reputation, should, through time, be accepted and retained as a gamekeeper; yet it is not more so than that a thief should become one of the most inveterate and desperate

hunters of thieves that ever trod Edinburgh streets, as I may show in a subsequent volume.

Just outside the town, there was at this time a narrow foot-path running across a couple of fields into a farm road at the other side; and up this path Tom Prowl, carrying gun and game bag, turned at an easy pace on the evening of which I speak. Sunset was deepening into gloaming, and his feet rustled noisily among the thick beds of fallen leaves; but a rustle of a different kind made him start and look forward before he was half-way through. It was only a young blithe-some-looking servant lassie tripping along towards him; but he smiled as he recognised her, and, in spite of her efforts to brush past with a nod, detained her by placing his gun longways across the narrow path.

"Are you in a great hurry, Bella?" he asked, with a grin, at her disappointment.

"Yes, I am." The words were shortly spoken, and she made a tug at the gun; but she might as well have attempted to bend one of the great tree branches.

"I didn't expect to meet such a bonnie face," he continued, heedless of her efforts, and putting on a flattering smile.

"Nor I such an ugly one," she smartly rejoined, with another tug at the gun barring the way.

"I don't know," he viciously returned; "I think my face is better than Joe Malcolm's, and I'll swear you're going to meet him now."

The thrust went home, for the girl's face crimsoned to the very roots of her hair.

"You have no business with me, nor any right to know where I'm going," she said at last, starting back with tears of vexation in her eyes.

"No, that's true," he coolly returned; "only I can't help wondering what you see in the fellow to admire. He's only a quiet sumph of a gardener. If he had been a gamekeeper, like his—his—father, it would have been a very different thing."

"Oh! I hate gamekeepers," emphatically rejoined the girl; "I hate them from the very bottom of my heart—and you worst of them all."

"Ah! but you might get over that," he pursued, with a savage laugh. "I'm a gamekeeper, and well off—settled for life on the best estate in the Lothians; and I intend to take a wife soon."

"Do you?—then I pity her," was the dauntless reply.

"Indeed! Why?"

"Because you're a brute; and if she gives you a cross word, you'll shoot her as readily as you would a hare or a partridge."

He dropped the gun now and seized her wrist, glaring searchingly into her face, with his own livid to the ears.

"What do you mean by that!" he hoarsely gasped. "Speak it out, or I'll throttle you on the spot!"

"I mean what I say—you're too good at shooting," fearlessly returned the girl. "I wouldn't be your wife for all the world, with all the stars into the bargain."

"Did you not mean it for a hint at old Malcolm's death?" he suspiciously pursued. "Out with it, now. When you're so fond of his son, you'll doubtless believe all the lies he tells about his father's death."

"Joe never mentions his father's name," proudly returned the girl, with a clear flashing look into the gamekeeper's face. "But I am sure he thinks of him—dreams of him. If the murderer were ever found out, he would have a bad chance, for Joe, quiet as you think him, would hunt him through the world."

Tom Prowl slackened his hold of the wrist, and allowed the dark scowl on his face to merge into a grin of contempt.

"I daresay he would; but there being no murderer in the case, he has to hold his hand," he sneered in reply. "But watch your words, or you may get both him and yourself into trouble. And try to think over what I've said about taking a wife, Bella; for if I do, it shall be you and no other."

"Me!" echoed the girl, with the greatest disgust and aversion written on her face. "No! I would sooner jump into the South Esk after a heavy spate."

"Well, please yourself," darkly rejoined the gamekeeper. "You'll shake hands anyhow?"

"No, I won't do that either. Go your ways, and let me go mine. Something tells me, Tom Prowl, that you're a bad man at heart, whether you've done all that people say or not, and that is enough to make me shun you."

"You won't?" he cried, blazing up in a passion, and again seizing her wrist, and nearly crushing it to splinters in his strong grasp. "Then I'll tell you what you shall do—you shall let me kiss you; and then you can tell Joe Malcolm who has been at your lips before him," and with a whirl he had her in his arms.

But he had entirely miscalculated the energy of the girl. In an instant her ten fingers were flashed across his face with all the strength that she could command, leaving ten red weals in the track of the sharp nails, setting herself free from the hated grasp, and converting him in appearance to a Dog-ribbed Indian in the full bloom of war-paint.

"You'll not try it again, I think," she cried, as she turned and flew from the spot.

"Take care," shouted the ruffian after her, for the moment completely taken off his guard, and reckless with passion. "Take care, Bella M'Kenzie, or I may do to Joe what I did to his father."

But Bella only turned round with a ringing laugh, and snapped her fingers in his face, little knowing how his fingers twitched at the lock of his gun, or what an evil fire had flamed up in his heart, cheerily pursuing her way to a certain walk by the river side, where she was to meet her lover, but not giving to the ominous words any special meaning. It was very different with her lover, for the moment that his father's name was mentioned in her account of the meeting with Prowl, she saw his hand go to his breast with a quick clutch that she had noted and wondered over many a time before. The gesture was so peculiar, and her womanly curiosity so active, that she stopped in the middle of her story to get at the reason.

"How is it, Joe, that whenever I speak of your father, or even mention his name, you always put your hand on your breast, as if feeling for something?"

"Don't ask me, Bella," was the agitated reply. "Only believe me that it is a trust so sacred that to remember it I would sacrifice even my love for you."

"I know what it is," she triumphantly put in, with a merry smile.

"You do?—impossible!" and the agitation of her lover appeared to increase rather than diminish.

"Yes, it's a charm—a love-charm, I think—that you wear hanging from your neck by that black ribbon inside your clothes. Do tell me, Joe, like a dear good fellow, what it's like. I know it's round—for I've felt it against your breast—and hard, just like a bullet."

There was a long silence, and Bella wondered why her lover's face looked so white through the darkness.

"Oh, Joe! don't look like that!" she cried, with the tears springing into her eyes. "And if I have said anything to offend you, forgive me, for I meant no ill."

"Forgive you!" he hastily replied. "No, Bella, I have nothing to forgive. But don't trouble your little head about my love-charm, as you call it, but tell me what else Prowl said."

"Oh! there was very little more. I told him I thought him no better than he was called, and then he tried to bully me into saying I was hinting at the killing of your father among the poachers. Then I told him that I could never be his wife, and that I wouldn't even shake hands with him; when he flew up in a passion and said he would kiss me, and then let me tell you."

"And did he do it?" slowly inquired Joe Malcolm.

"Do it? No, nor twenty men of his size, if I said nay," was the dauntless answer. "I scratched his face with all my might—both hands—and got off, leaving him cursing. Oh, by-the-bye; yes, he said, as I ran off: 'Take care, Bella M'Kenzie, or I may do for Joe what I did for his father.'"

"Ha! did he say that?"

There was a mighty change, indeed, as these words came forth. The whole aspect of the quiet young gardener was altered; his eyes lighted up with a fire she had never seen there before; and the wrench at her hand, made in the excitement of the moment, was scarcely less violent than that of the ruffianly gamekeeper.

"Joe, you frighten me!" cried Bella, without answering his question.

"And you have only nerved me," was the excited reply. "Oh, Bella! speak as if you stood in actual judgment before your Maker—for a terrible fate depends upon your answer—did Tom Prowl use these very words, and no others that you might have taken up wrongly?"

"He used these very words; but, dear Joe, they didn't frighten me a bit. Why, I turned round and laughed in his face, and snapped my fingers like that; for I know what a brave noble heart you have, though people think you quiet, and that you could stand your ground against twenty such bullies as he."

"Then the time has come!" softly ejaculated her lover, raising his hands towards heaven and looking reverently upwards; "what I have dreamt of, hunted for, and even prayed for all these years, is at last placed in my grasp!"

But softly as the words were spoken, they caught the quick ear of Bella M'Kenzie, and nearly petrified her with terror.

"Joe! Joe!" she almost screamed, "you would not pick a quarrel with the brute? Oh! promise me that you will not fight."

"I promise you that I will neither quarrel with him nor fight him—he does not deserve it," returned Joe, with a wild gleam in his eye that made him shudder instinctively; and then, in a passionate burst, he cried, "No, the Bible says, 'Blood for blood,' and my oath to my father was sworn on that very passage."

"Joe! Joe! you're surely mad!" cried the frightened girl, shaking him by the arm to try and rouse him; "what is it that makes your eyes glare so terribly? and why do you speak about 'blood?' It makes me shudder to hear you."

The wild entreaty appeared to soften him at once, for he took her face in his hands and kissed her forehead three times, with his own eyes glistening with tears, and a look of agony and grief on his face that betrayed a great inward struggle.

"You, too, must suffer with me," he almost groaned; "but such an oath can never be broken."

"Don't say another word about it," fearfully returned the girl, playfully putting her hand over his mouth and stopping his utterance. "I wish I had never mentioned Tom Prowl's name, for it seems to have turned your wits upside down. Come, Joe, like a good fellow, speak about something else—about our marriage, if you like;" and she tried to smile over a beating heart.

"No, no—not of that," was the shuddering reply; "anything but that."

"Anything but that indeed!" retorted the girl, with a pretty pout covering the keen motherly watchfulness with which she was scanning and trying to read his face. "I tell you what it is, Joe: if you don't rouse yourself and speak to me sensibly, I'll go away home and never come near you again."

But this little ruse was of no avail, for Joe only shivered and kissed her again, still tearfully, and looked wearily about him, as if anxious to get home. She had never seen her lover thus moved before; and though she chatted on and ferreted out of her mind every lively subject likely to make him smile, the walk came to an end with Joe as silent and grave as ever. He bade her good-bye at the usual spot, and his manner was even more affectionate than usual; but it struck a nameless chill to her heart, as if it were more like a dying farewell than a mere lover's parting. Did she then pursue her way homewards, content to remain puzzled, mystified, and alarmed? Would she have been a woman if she did? I think not. Joe strode off along the dark road and plunged down among the

trees towards his home—the little cottage that was to have been hers in so short a time ; but he never looked behind, or he could scarcely have failed to notice that Bella was following and watching him every step. Joe kept muttering to himself ; and though Bella, with all her intensity of excitement, could not hear the words, or make out the subject of his thoughts, we are more privileged, and may here pause a moment to describe the scene that was burning vividly before his eyes.

Just ten years before, and towards the end of October, three well-known poachers went out for a night's shooting on the estate of the gentleman whom Joe now served as gardener. One of the party was Tom Prowl, then scarcely twenty, but in reputation as bad as bad could be. They all carried guns and shot ; and Tom Prowl, whatever he carried on this particular night, had been heard to say, not long before, that for the purpose of frightening gamekeepers he always carried in his waistcoat pocket a lead bullet, which could be slipped into a gun at a moment's notice, and which was far more effectual than all the shot in the world. What afterwards added confusion to the case was the fact that near that part of the ground chosen by these three, other poachers were out—the woods, in fact, ringing with their guns on every side. The three poachers, at Tom Prowl's suggestion, with all the audacity of experienced hands, took to that part of the grounds nearest the house of Malcolm, the gamekeeper, thinking that the vigilant old man would be far from the spot, at the more unprotected parts of the plantation. Here, however, they were completely mistaken ; for it happened that Malcolm had been that afternoon confined to bed, and he no sooner heard the well-known sound of the poachers' guns than he leaped up, in spite of every remonstrance, dressed hurriedly, and left the house, gun in hand. Joe was only a lad at the time, and fast asleep in bed ; but from this sleep he was roused by his mother, candle in hand and pale with fright, tugging him by the arm.

"Get up, Joe, like a good lad," she hurriedly whispered. "Your father is out among the poachers, and I'm afraid there has been a fight. I heard shouts, and then a shot ; but it is all still now, and yet he hasn't come back. I cannot sit here any longer, so we will go together to the Braefoot Copse and see if anything's wrong."

Joe was out of bed, and dressed, and out in the open air almost before his eyes were open, with his mother running by his side, with only a shawl hastily drawn over her head. They

reached the copse, and then Joe made his trembling mother sit down on a fallen tree while he ran in to explore. At the darkest part of the copse his feet stumbled on something soft, and, stooping down, he felt the form of a man, who uttered a groan as the lad tried to raise him. Something wet and clammy, which stained Joe's hands like dark paint, was oozing from the man's breast; and, with a shout of grief, the lad had the heavy form up in his arms and borne out towards his mother almost quicker than he could have run alone. The dull starlight in the glade outside revealed the features of the wounded man—it was Joe's father, Malcolm, the gamekeeper. Joe remembered the scream of his mother, the wild wreathing of her arms round the wounded man, and her wailing cries as she helped to bear him back to the cottage; but a few moments later he was speeding like the wind down to the town for a doctor. When he returned, his father was lying in bed, propped up with pillows, perfectly still, but with eyes wide open. With some difficulty the bullet was extracted, and then the wound was dressed, though the medical man held out little or no hope of his recovery. By this time the Superintendent of Police and a magistrate had arrived, and it was deemed advisable to take the gamekeeper's deposition. It was very short, and came out with a terrible torture and in faint gasps.

"I came on three poachers in the Braefoot Copse. Their faces were blackened, and it was very dark; but I am sure Tom Prowl was one of them. I asked them to give up their guns, but they only laughed; and then one of them suddenly felled me from behind. They ran off in different directions; but while I was getting up, a gun was fired from among the trees, and I dropped and fainted away."

As soon as the document was signed, and the necessary oath made and attested, the magistrate and superintendent retired to take steps for the capture of the poachers, and the doctor was about to follow, when the wounded man, whose eyes had followed every motion, weakly motioned towards the table, where lay the doctor's probes, with the bullet he had just extracted.

"Father wants a drink," said Joe, who was the first to notice the movement; but Malcolm only shook his head in a decided negative, and even more energetically pointed to the bullet.

"Give—me—that!" he slowly enunciated; and it was at once snatched up by Joe, carefully wiped, and placed in his

hand; nor could any persuasion induce him to give it up again to the custody of the doctor, who thought it would be required as evidence if ever the case came to trial. The doctor left at last, enjoining the utmost quiet, and the most careful nursing and watching of his patient; and then, strangely enough, Malcolm insisted on his wife retiring to Joe's bed in the next room, while the lad remained up all night with him. It took much persuasion to induce the poor wife to quit his bedside; but the effort seemed to agitate him so violently, that at length, for his own sake, she consented and retired. The father appeared to listen intently till he made sure she had retired, and then in a low whisper, asked Joe to bring the little Bible from off the mantelpiece. Joe obeyed, wondering and fearful; and the old man, half-raising himself, directed him to a certain passage in *Leviticus*.

"Read it out, Joe," he gasped, "but very softly, so that mother won't hear it."

Then Joe, in choking accents, read the following words:—

"If any man cause a blemish in his neighbour: as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. He that killeth a man shall be put to death."

"That'll do, Joe," said the wounded man, with his face lighted by the reading of the words to a ghastly ferocity. "Now, take my hand and listen to me. I'll never get better, Joe—never in this world. I'm a murdered man, and the only man that could have done it is Tom Prowl. But there's no protection or avenger for the gamekeeper. There's some of us killed every year, but when do they ever get the murderers hanged? When I'm gone, Joe, they'll get up a trial and all that; but it'll only be a fuss for a while, and then every one will be let off, and the thing forgotten. Do you hear?"

"Yes, father—every word."

"Good boy, Joe; here's the bullet that's done the work; take it in your hand, lad. There, you don't flinch, and there's a light in your eye that tells me you know what I want. That's the Bible you've just read. Now put your hand on the place. Have you done it? for my eyes are getting misty."

"Yes, father, I've done it—only feel," readily returned the lad, placing hands and book in the feeble grasp of his father.

"Good. Now listen. If my murderer, whoever he may be, escapes the gallows, and you should ever get at what you think clear proof of his guilt, swear to lodge this bullet in his heart!"

"Father, I swear!" solemnly responded the boy; and raising his hand from the blood-stained page, he reverently kissed the bullet which his father had placed in his hands.

"And listen, Joe," eagerly whispered the gamekeeper, drawing him closer. "Tom Prowl has owed me a long grudge since I lamed him and got him taken up. I am certain he is the man. Watch him day and night, carry that bullet where you cannot lose it; and if ever God grant you light on this outrage, remember your father and your oath to him on his deathbed."

"Father, I shall never forget it," solemnly answered Joe. "Nothing shall ever stand between me and my oath."

"Good boy; I can die happy now. Never be a gamekeeper, Joe. Look after your mother, and guard that bullet as you would a treasure."

"I will, I will! but oh, father! perhaps you'll not die," responded the boy, bursting into tears. "It is surely not so bad as that."

"It is, Joe; but I am happy," faintly gasped the sinking man; and then, in the effort to strain the boy to his breast, he brought on such a relapse that Joe was glad to scream for his mother to try to bring him back to life and sense.

But Malcolm had been a true prophet in more things than one, and his hours at that moment were numbered. He lingered on till the afternoon of the next day, and then quietly breathed his last, after pressing Joe's hand, and giving him a look that haunted him during all the after years. The gamekeeper's prediction regarding the trial and its results was fulfilled to the letter. The three poachers were duly arrested, but, though they were kept in separate cells and plied in every imaginable way, none of them could say that he saw the shot fired. At last two were discharged on bail, whilst Prowl was committed, pending further investigation. But even this case broke down; and while one of the poachers got three months' imprisonment for assault,—knocking down Malcolm before the fatal shot was fired,—Tom Prowl, about whose guilt few had a doubt, after paying a heavy fine for simple poaching, walked out of court a free man.

I may now bring the reader back to Joe where we left him, striding through dead leaves and towering trees with the above incidents blazing before his eyes, and dulling his senses to the rustling of the watchful Bella as she fluttered along in his wake. I would wrong this spirited and intelligent girl much if I did

not say that mere curiosity held but a minor place in the promptings to her present course. It was love—strong, fixed, and deep—that chiefly sent her flitting in the wake of her sweetheart. Neither had she yet any idea of the danger that she thought to avert: that knowledge was to come and very quickly.

Joe entered the cottage without once looking in her direction, and presently she saw a light in his own room. All the other windows were dark, and no one else appeared to be stirring within—the old body who now acted as Joe's housekeeper having been in bed two hours before. Bella crept close to the twinkling light, and then found that in his excitement Joe had quite forgotten to close the shutters. His movements about the room were so strange, that, with a fascination quite beyond her power to resist, she crept closer and closer, till her white face almost touched the window panes. Inside she saw Joe kneel before a heavy trunk, put the key in the lock, and then, apparently overcome with emotion, sink his face on his hands, shaking from head to foot, as if wrestling in prayer. He became calm after a moment or two, opened the trunk, and took out, very deliberately, first a double-barrelled gun, and then a little pocket Bible. The gun he propped in a corner till he turned over the leaves of the Bible to a passage near the beginning of the book, which was covered with brown stains, and this he hung over for some time with the tears standing thick in his eyes. Then he laid the book aside; and taking the black ribbon from his neck over his head, he began to draw something up from under his clothes. Now Bella's heart beat thick and fast as she watched for the appearance of the mysterious charm that had so often puzzled her womanly instincts; but the end of the black ribbon came up, and attached to it a bag of chamois leather. This was instantly opened and shaken above the table, and then Bella's heart gave a sickening bound when there dropped out—a lead bullet!

Bella did not faint, though she was never nearer doing so in her life, but she grasped hard at the lintel of the window to keep her from sinking to the ground, and with her very heart standing still within her, and a face as white as a ghost, she strained her eyes for the next movement, which was very coolly and rapidly executed. Joe took from the trunk a gamekeeper's powder-flask, and deliberately loaded one barrel of the gun with a blank shot, the wadding being the stained leaf torn from the Bible, over which she had seen him hang with such

emotion and reverence. Thus far Bella had some hope, and even began to breathe more freely ; but his next movement instantly dispelled the feeling. After very carefully examining the nipple and lock of the second barrel, Joe filled in the necessary quantity of powder, wrapped the lead bullet on the table in a piece cut from the little chamois leather bag, inserted that into the mouth of the barrel, and with a firm hand rammed it home. But as he grew firm, the heart of the poor girl outside appeared to leave her. She moaned faintly, and allowed her limbs to give way under her till she was on her knees before the window, still grasping despairingly at the lintel, and desperately trying, through the whirl of thought, to think of some prayer for help—help to save him. Joe's work within now seemed complete, for he tugged on his cap, buttoned up his coat to the top, threw the gun over his shoulder, and turned out the light. He was outside a minute after ; and then, as he strode off through the dark trees in the direction of the B—— estate, Bella's wavering senses came back, and she sprang lightly to her feet and followed as before. The walk was not a very long one, for the two estates nearly touched each other ; but, short as it was, Bella's agitation, as she staggered on in the wake of her sweetheart, soon increased to a painful degree, and the cause was simple—Joe was making straight for the cottage of the gamekeeper, Tom Prowl. What wild prayers went up through those trees I cannot even guess, for she herself could never afterwards recall them : I can only proceed to show whether or not they were answered.

Joe stopped at last at the very edge of the plantation, and within thirty yards of Prowl's cottage-door, and busied himself with his knife at a tree having low sweeping branches. Selecting a suitable branch as a rest for his gun, he cut away every twig or leaf that interfered with the sight facing the gamekeeper's door, tried the gun on the rest, and then tossed away the knife among the bushes behind. Bella flitted nearer and nearer ; but before she was within fifty yards of her sweetheart, her heart nearly leaped from her mouth at the sudden discharge of the gun. Joe had raised it and fired the blank shot in the air, for the purpose of rousing the gamekeeper within, and the reverberations had not died away when the long barrels were resting on the low branch, with Joe's keen eye behind, and levelled straight at the door from which he expected the savage gamekeeper to issue. The smoke of the discharge curled slowly upwards, and was lost in white wreaths

in the darkness above; then there was a quick flash of light from one of the windows of the cottage, and a hurried tramp of feet within; and then the light disappeared, the door was banged open, and Tom Prowl, half-dressed, but gun in hand, appeared on the threshold. The gun on the tree shifted slightly, and Joe bent down for a more deliberate aim; but then, with a great scream, Bella rushed forward and wrenched at the gun. The scream mingled with the report of the gun, which was followed by a yell of agony from the wounded gamekeeper. Bella had been just half a second late; and though she had saved the man's life, the gun had not swerved far from the mark, and the bullet had ploughed a deep red groove across Prowl's shoulder. A wound to such a man was like a stab to a grisly bear—it only roused him and added to his ferocity. With a rush he was in among the trees, and in an instant Bella, who still held the gun in her hand, was seized and held fast.

"So, you she-tiger, this is your revenge!" he hissed through his teeth. "And you, Joe Malcolm, in her company! I wonder you hadn't more sense. It shall go hard with you both—transportation at least;" and, putting a whistle to his mouth, he gave out a long "birr," that was instantly answered faintly from some distant coverts.

With a wrench the powerful brute was hurled off from the shrinking girl, and then Joe calmly folded his arms and said—

"It was I who fired the gun, and I meant to kill you, Tom Prowl—to shoot you like a dog, as you did my father, and with the same bullet. She wrenched at the gun—though how she happens to be here I cannot tell—and thus saved your worthless life. Poor girl! she has sacrificed mine, and saved yours; therefore don't be hard on her by hatching such a foul lie."

"Your story is well got up," sneered Prowl, writhing with the pain of his shoulder, and trying to staunch the flowing blood; "but it shall save neither of you. You are part and parcel together, and have deliberately attempted my life; and together therefore you must suffer;" and as he spoke two undergamekeepers burst in upon them, and the two prisoners were at once secured.

"Take care, Tom Prowl," cried Joe, as they were being led away, "I have that which may hang you! If I had not feared the quibbles and quirks of the law, I would have put you in its power rather than have attempted to kill you single-handed."

Prowl staggered back, pale and alarmed at the threat, but

still tried to draw on a bold front ; and thus they parted—Joe and Bella being taken away and lodged with the police superintendent, and Prowl being helped off to get his wound dressed.

The next day I had a message to come out and investigate the whole affair. I went out accordingly ; but I found the task difficult enough, till, with some persuasion, I succeeded in extracting the whole story from the prisoner, Joe Malcolm. The case interested me deeply ; but though I felt the most lively sympathy for Joe, I could not help trying to convince him that his oath, and the foundation on which it was built, was thoroughly barbarous ; and that we, living under a milder and more lovely dispensation, are bound by laws very different than they for whom the stern decrees of the Pentateuch were framed. Joe was thoroughly melted, and when I rose and told him I would try to devise a scheme by which Bella would be set free and his own sentence made comparatively light, he seized my hand and wrung it, and spoke some words of gratitude which I will not repeat here.

My plan was very simple. I had already decided that, in spite of Joe's firm conviction of Prowl's guilt in connection with the murder of his father, and the words unwittingly dropped in the hearing of Bella M'Kenzie, Joe could have no case against him. The words, "What I did to his father," might mean anything—a wrong or injury of the lightest description as well as actual murder. My course, then, was to keep this conviction entirely within my own breast, and merely drop a few words carelessly in the gossip little town, which I felt sure would soon reach Prowl's ear in a magnified form. And never did I make a surer calculation. Prowl, between this report and the deadly threat of Joe on the night of his capture, became thoroughly frightened, and speedily resolved to make terms, as the following note addressed to the prisoner will show :—

"JOE MALCOLM,—I want to make you an offer, which you may take or let alone as you think fit. Say nothing against me, and I will undertake to get you off. If you send me a paper, in which you swear never to attempt to injure me, or speak against me, or stir up old stories, you shall get off without a day's imprisonment. Don't let any one see this, but burn it the moment you read it. Hoping to hear from you, I am,

"Your wellwisher,

"THOS. PROWL."

This note, of course, was at once sent in to me, and after a good deal of consultation, it was at last decided that we had

sufficient grounds to warrant us in arresting Prowl. The warrant was made out, and I was sent to serve it ; but I had only the journey for my pains, for Prowl, fearing consequences, had evaporated suddenly and mysteriously, leaving this note behind, which was addressed to myself :—

“SIR,—The story of my being shot at and wounded by Joe Malcolm was merely trumped up by me to injure him. He never fired at me, and the wound on my shoulder I got in running under the sharp broken branch of a tree. Joe and Bella are both innocent, and should not be punished. I have left the place, and will never come back.

“THOMAS PROWL.”

This written lie, which to me did not conceal the craven fear lurking beneath, had at least one good effect—it was the means of setting Joe and his sweetheart free. The story of the bullet having been detailed to me under the promise of inviolable secrecy, of course could never come up against Joe as evidence, or, indeed, get beyond my own lips ; and as he and his wife were soon absorbed in the stream of emigrants to the Far West, I don't think it can injure him now.

CARD-SHARPERS SHARPED.

AMONG the batch of criminals seized at the trapping of Mac-lusky, who were so implicated as to be favoured with various terms of imprisonment, was a man whose amazing impudence, monkey-like trickery, and wonderful ingenuity, had earned for him the title of "The Prince of Impudence." Though his schemes never showed any great depth of conception, he was certainly brimful of a kind of superficial cleverness ; and I dare say if the *inevitable result* could be carefully kept in the background, a good deal of amusement could be got from the narration of some of his tricks. He was not all bad, and on more than one occasion he did us good service ; and that, with his ready tongue, and the fact that he was by no means a criminal of the worst type, made me have a sort of half-liking for the rascal.

It is said that there is "honour among thieves ;" but I need scarcely say that the moment their interests pull in opposite directions the saying becomes the veriest fiction. And by none was this fact better appreciated than "The Prince." He swindled thieves and honest alike, as opportunity served, without the slightest compunction.

Shortly after he first turned up in Edinburgh—he hailed from London originally, I believe—it came to the knowledge of the gang he was associated with, that a certain gentleman at the West End had some valuable plate in his possession ; and knowing the cleverness of "The Prince," and nothing more, they pitched on him as a ferret to discover the best means of appropriating them.

He accepted the difficult office with a readiness that charmed them, and, setting forth, had a look at the place—a fine self-contained house nearly opposite Randolph Crescent. He had been furnished with all the information his new acquaintance could supply, and his appointed task was of course to find out the most available spot and time for "cracking the crib ;" but other thoughts occupied his fertile brain on the way. In a

word, he could not see why so much plunder should be frittered away on a gang, and had resolved by some master stroke to appropriate the whole.

But how? He walked up and down before the house, puffing at his cigar for some time, but could hit on no plan, till the sight of the postman approaching roused his drooping faculties.

"Ah! I will try him," quoth "The Prince," lounging negligently forward from the gate towards the man. "His parcel may furnish me with an idea," and he favoured the man with a charming smile and a slight bow. "Ah! anything for my father this morning?"

"What name?" inquired the man.

"Mr Scales, Cliff Villa," and "The Prince" pointed back over his shoulder with his cigar at the house in question.

"Yes, I have two; but—"

"Ah! I am aware that you are not allowed to give them up on the street; very proper—any swindler might ask for them. But you might just let me have a look at the addresses. I rather think one of them is for me; and being named after my father, some confusion at times arises."

The man produced the letters, and "The Prince," with an ecstatic smile, recognised one of them at once.

"Ah, it's from Frank—dear Frank!" he rapturously exclaimed. "I knew he would answer by return, and he always uses that horrid blue paper. Now, I'm dying to know the contents, but am too lazy to go back to the house with you. You might just take them down and leave that one, but bring Frank's back to me. I will give you a trifle for the trouble."

Incredible as it may appear, the man actually did so unchallenged. The letter was brought back and placed in his hand, and then, by way of payment, he said to the simple postman—

"Ah! I know you are not allowed to receive gratuities, and here on the street you might be seen taking it; so I will just leave it with the servant, and you can get it the next time you come round." And this, I have no doubt, was said in a way that made the man depart feeling richer than if he had been tipped half-a-crown.

An ordinary letter-stealer would have slunk away and opened it in some obscure corner. Not so "The Prince." He coolly took out a penknife, and opened it where he stood, and in sight of at least half-a-dozen cabmen at
posite.

As the letter came into my hands after, the following is nearly an exact copy—

“DEAR UNCLE,—You will not recognise me. Time and trouble have made such sad havoc on me that people will think me not your nephew, but your brother.

“I expect to arrive in Edinburgh and be with you on Friday afternoon; but do not absent yourself from business on my account: my aunt and I, from the account you give me of her, will get on very well till you arrive.

“Your affectionate nephew,

“ROBERT SCALES.”

“The Prince” folded up the note with a new light in his eye.

“So my ‘dear uncle’ has gone to business, and the only one I have to deal with is ‘my aunt,’ who apparently does not know me. How lucky that I thought of the postman! This is only Thursday, it is true; but it is easy to beat my own letter and arrive a day earlier. I wonder whether it would be proper for me to arrive in a cab or on foot?”

He examined the state of his funds, and eventually decided on having a sixpenny ride from the stand at the west end of Princes Street. He arrived with a flourish, made the cabman ring the bell, and then, when the door was wide open, and every window occupied by a peeping face, he got out with that gentlemanly ease which it was his peculiar vanity to affect. With a sweet smile into the servant’s face, that made her feel quite flurried, he inquired if his aunt was at home, and was at once shown into a room to await her coming.

A pair of gold spectacles and a beautiful mother-of-pearl card case, lying on the marble mantelpiece, at once caught his eye; and after carefully ascertaining if they were worth taking, he very quickly transferred them to his own pocket. Just as he had done so, Mrs Scales entered the room, looking a good deal agitated and concerned about her own *l’éshabille*, she having been called away from a very important piece of business by his unexpected arrival, viz., superintending the cleaning of the silver plate. Yet she stared at him dubiously.

“Ah! my dear aunt,” he cried, putting an end to her doubts, and imprinting a dutiful kiss on her brow, “I cannot describe to you the happiness I feel at seeing you, and actually pressing your hand within my own. But you appear puzzled. You do not recognise me, perhaps?”

Mrs Scales made a thousand apologies.

“Of course, I could not expect to recognise you,” she said; “but I always understood that you were fair, and not dark.”

"Alas! it is too true," pathetically rejoined "The Prince." "I once was fair; but time and trouble have worked on me the change you now behold. But my dear uncle?"

Mrs Scales, unluckily for herself, was gifted with a most voluble tongue, and in five minutes "The Prince" had adroitly extracted from her all the information he desired while sipping the wine she had placed before him, even down to the interesting fact that she had been getting the silver plate cleaned in anticipation of his arrival.

"My dear aunt, do not on any account allow me to disturb you," he cried, starting up; "besides, my things are at the station, and I must see about them myself. I always remember my uncle's words—'Never leave that to another which you can do yourself.'"

Mrs Scales, however, assured him that the interesting work was completed, and the silver plate safely put past. He expressed a polite doubt as to the correctness of her statement; he could not understand how so much work could be got through in one morning; and the cleaning and putting away of silver plate was a thing, he flattered himself, that he knew something about. With a flutter of pride, Mrs Scales invited him to come and see for himself, and, with many protests against troubling her, he followed her to the next room, where the plate-safe was built into the wall. He admired the plate, he admired the safe and its massive strength, and he particularly admired the key with which it was locked; and nothing would satisfy his whim, after Mrs Scales had shown him how to lock and unlock it, but he must lock it himself and give her the key—which feat he accomplished so well that his most strenuous exertions could not move or open the door.

They left the room together; and after she had shown him over the whole house, and he had picked up sundry trifles on the way, his first move was to ask if she could lend him a large hamper, or basket, in which to pack a lot of odds and ends, now lying at the station. He was at once accommodated, and then left to make a few trifling changes in his apparel—the whole of Mr Scales' wardrobe having been placed at his disposal. In a few minutes he announced himself as ready—having appropriated a light overcoat and a new satin hat of Mr Scales', which, he laughingly remarked, were a shade too wide for him, but would serve his purpose very well. The hamper which was to bring back "his odds and ends," with an utter absence of pride, he carried to the door himself, and with his

own hands helped the cabman to place it on the dickey ; but the servant, and even Mrs Scales herself, remarked that he was evidently unaccustomed to such work, as he carried it with an effort, as if it were not light and empty, but filled with some weighty material. Then "The Prince" waved them a graceful adieu from the cab window, and drove off.

Now, before all this had taken place, a trifling incident had occurred to me. Passing through Hunter Square, I happened to notice two well-known thieves directly in front of me so absorbed in their own whispered conversation as to be unaware of my presence. Taking this for a sure sign of mischief, I got close up behind, and made out the following—

"Oh, 'The Prince' is seeing about that."

"Where is it?"

"West End."

That was all. They cut into an entry on the South Bridge and disappeared ; and, after a moment's thought, I turned, went back to the Office, and had a talk with M'Sweeny.

Very soon we were tramping off towards the West End in hope of getting a sight of "The Prince," and with some curiosity to learn the particular business which took him there. We got as far as Frederick Street, when M'Sweeny suddenly exclaimed—

"Begorra ! there's the multaverin' thafe o' the world in a cab."

"Where?"

"There—just past us. Faix ! I believe it's goin' to turn into Rose Street. Let's see what he's up to. He's got a hamper on the dickey, and is looking moightily well pleased wid himself."

We were after the cab with a run, and reached the corner just as it was pulling up before a common stair. We got alongside just as "The Prince" was daintily stepping out, and saluted him with some remark about the pleasantness of the weather. Though he cheerfully returned the salutation, he appeared to be somewhat pressed for time ; so we ventured to inquire his destination.

"Out of town," he said, with an attempt at an easy smile. "I think a change of scenery will do me good. I will not detain you. Good day;" and he would have hurried past, but I interposed, while M'Sweeny lifted down the hamper.

"Sure, yer basket's moighty heavy ! It must take a lot of topcoats to weigh it down," he remarked, as he let it flop heavily down on the pavement.

It gave out a peculiar metallic sound, and M'Sweeny curiously turned his ear on one side.

"What's that?"

"Oh, nothing! Some flower-pots I was taking with me. Nothing more," hurriedly returned "The Prince," trying to look as if he was not ready to drop into his boots with fear.

"What are they made of?" inquisitively pursued M'Sweeny, trying the lid. "If there's anything in the blessed world I loike to see, it's flower-pots."

The raised lid disclosed a fine, flowered tablecloth, and this being turned aside showed a layer of highly-polished silver plate.

"Beautiful!" cried M'Sweeny. "Bedad! I never saw such purty flower-pots before!"

"The Prince" at this moment made a sudden dive between us, and ran. It was a stiff chase, but I got him before he reached Hanover Street; and then we re-engaged the cab, and conveyed him and his valuable "flower-pots" to the Office. On the way he amused us by emptying his pockets of the gold spectacles and the cardcase, as well as a gold necklet, a silver brooch, and several other trinkets. The freshly-cut note addressed to Mrs Scales especially interested us, and we were about to set out for the place, when another cab rattled up, and Mrs Scales appeared in a state of great excitement, to say that some invisible thief had spirited away the most of her silver plate and a number of other articles of value. But when we showed her the identical articles, the reaction was so great that she fainted clean away.

"The Prince" was rather crestfallen, but frankly confessed the whole affair, even down to the fact that he had intended to swindle his pals, have the whole melted on his own account, and escape with the proceeds. Manifestly, however, the run of luck which had helped him so far was now dead against him, and he was fairly in for a long sentence. It is true, it would be his first conviction with us; but we had noted his hand in several little affairs before, and he knew that we could make it hard for him at the trial.

A few hours' reflection appeared to impress these facts on his mind, for he sent for me, and then made a very strange proposal. In order to understand it rightly, the reader must know that at that time Edinburgh was, and had been for some months, infested by a gang of clever card-sharpers, who were got up regardless of expense, and whose plan of action was so

well matured and so rigorously adhered to, that it was quite out of our power to interfere with them. They had located themselves in capital lodgings in Hill Place, where they lived like lords of the land; and I must confess, a more gentlemanly-looking lot of scoundrels I have never clapped eyes on. Their continued successes were bringing quite a bad name on our fair city. Only the day before, a wealthy sheep farmer from the North had been swindled out of £28, and more than one scheme had been broached, but broached in vain, for routing them out.

This "The Prince" now proposed to do on two conditions: that we should make it as light as possible for him at the trial, and that nothing he might do in the routing out business would be brought up against him. Had he not been such a notorious liar, I might have jumped at the proposal at once; but it took some time and talking to convince me that he was not merely devising a means of escape. When I found, however, that he was really in earnest, and had actually matured a plan which he confidently boasted himself able to carry out, and that the said carrying out, if successful, would be an incalculable benefit to himself, I agreed to the plan, and immediately made arrangements for having it carried out. This plan, though requiring great skill and caution, was exceedingly simple; indeed, it was nothing more than one I remembered practising at school with "bools and buttons." Whenever any young gamester became obnoxious to us, it was our practice to join together and play him hard till he was "rookit;" that is, till he had not a "bool" left, and was forced to go his way lamenting. As "The Prince" professed to be so expert with both thimbles and cards that few, if any, could stand against him, and we had more than once heard the same thing from other quarters, we were a little hopeful as to the result—the more so as he spoke of the gang as a lot of greenhorns who had not the slightest claim to the honourable title of card-sharpers. One other condition he did lay down; and here his monkey-like cunning will be apparent. The whole of the money he expected to lay hands on was to be forwarded to a certain address, which he would name, in London. But as he was to provide the stakes—the said stakes to be fetched by us from one of his "hides"—the ceiling of a garret in the Cowgate—we readily agreed that the condition was only fair. I had afterwards reason to believe that his plan had been matured before we laid hands on him, and that, with professional pride, he wished to put it into

execution before retiring from active life for whatever space of time the judge was pleased to appoint. Like all his schemes that ever came under my notice, it cut both ways, and served him fully as much as it served any one else.

Next morning everything was ready ; and after he had been placed at the bar and remitted to a higher court, we took him and rigged him out. It was arranged that we were to be two simple but wealthy tourists from the North, staying for the present at Edinburgh, but now strolling out as far as Craigmillar Castle to see its romantic beauties ; and also that he was to be the rash, foolish one, eager to play and win, and I was to be cautious and have a great dislike and fear of gambling generally. Unknown to my companion, I had made ample provision at every cross-road within half-a-mile of the Castle for laying hands on him if he tried to escape ; but such a thought, I believe, never entered his mind. We took a cab out as far as the toll, and walked the remainder of the distance, and had not got more than halfway up the brae leading to the Castle, when one of the touts of the sharpers had us in tow. At first he was a tourist, like ourselves, and was delighted to hear that we were also from the North ; but after he had explained and pointed out the objects of historical interest, and done so with considerable ability, we came suddenly in sight of the other members playing diligently at cards, and apparently utterly oblivious of our presence. Then our new friend took us aside and whispered that he had an important communication to make to us, which we must keep a profound secret.

"Gentlemen," he said, with apparent frankness, "I am not, as I told you, a tourist. I have deceived you ; but I will do so no longer. The men you see there are card-sharpers—whom I am about to trap ; in a word, I am a detective officer."

"Then you are from Edinburgh, after all ?" I remarked simply.

"I admit it—I humbly admit it, gentlemen. I belong to the detective staff of the city. My name—perhaps you have heard it—is M'Govan—James M'Govan."

"What ! Surely I should know that name !" I cried, with perfect truth, as the reader knows. "Have I the honour of shaking hands with Mr M'Govan, the energetic Edinburgh detective ?" and I worked his hand like a pump-handle for some moments.

"No honour at all, sir. I simply do my duty," he returned, with touching modesty. "But these card-sharpers—I intend

to fight them on their own ground. You, whose tastes are so closely akin to my own, shall see me do it. They will have cause to remember our visit."

"They will, indeed," remarked "The Prince," with catching enthusiasm.

"It is only fair," continued my new namesake, with some asperity. "Such rascals ought to be punished."

"So they ought," I echoed, with simple fervour.

"They ply their nefarious vocation here to be beyond the bounds of the police," he continued, evidently quoting from some newspaper account; "but little do they think that the police are on their track—ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorused "The Prince."

"Ha, ha, ha!" I echoed; and the knowing chuckle ran round us all, as we nudged each other's side, and enjoyed ourselves generally.

We got pretty close to the trio in question, and then the "detective" inquired if we knew anything about cards. I replied that I could play at "Catch the Ten," while "The Prince" vaguely said that he had tried them. And he spoke the truth, for at that moment he had new cards of exactly the same pattern as those we were looking down upon stowed away in the oddest places about his person—in his waistcoat pockets, in his sleeves, and even in the lining of his coat. I had seen him buy them and mark them with a fine needle, in a manner invisible to the eye, but quite palpable to a delicate touch; and he assured me he had repeatedly watched them buy theirs in the same shop. I now was waiting for his first move with interest and some little excitement.

"But what are those little thimbles for, which they are putting the pea under?" inquired "The Prince," with great simplicity. "I think we could do them now, for I know where the pea is."

"Do you, indeed?" cried the "detective," with great eagerness. "Tell me, and I will stake five pounds on it."

"The middle one."

The five pounds were staked, and the "detective," to his visible delight, won. Prompted by "The Prince," he tried again, and again was successful, and then "The Prince" was invited to try his hand.

"Five pounds that you cannot tell where the pea is! Stake your money. There, I will put mine in silver, so that you cannot fear flash notes," volubly cried one of the sharpers.

"Stake your money—stake your money. Five pounds that you cannot tell where the pea is."

To my astonishment, "The Prince" coolly staked the money, seized the man's hand by the wrist, turned out the thumb from the palm, and disclosed the pea.

"There, I think I have shown where it is; the five pounds are mine," he said, lifting the money, which was genuine coin of the realm. "I thought there was some cheating about it, so I watched you. The pea was never under the thimble at all."

The whole gang—"detective" and all—looked dumfounded; but the one caught tried to laugh it off, doubtless with a view of getting back his money.

"Well, there is a trick about it, I admit," he said, with apparent thankfulness; "but here is a pack of cards—new; never been opened, and only bought a few hours ago. There can be no trickery about them, for every one gets a fair deal. Just try one for the fun of the thing."

"The Prince" did try, with an inimitable look of simplicity, carefully examining, before playing, every note and coin staked by the sharpers.

Then began the winning, which from the beginning continued persistently in favour of "The Prince." For the life of me, I could not tell how it was done. I could see that occasionally "The Prince" made peculiar movements about his person, but they were so rapidly executed that it was impossible to discover what he was about. He afterwards tried to explain the tricks, and even went through the process of changing the cards slowly before my eyes, but still it was a mystery to me. I could only admire his remarkable sleight of hand, and regret that it had not been applied to a more worthy purpose. In a very short time every genuine note and coin in the possession of the gang had been transferred to his pocket, and they had found it useless to try him with sham ones. They had also discovered by this time that he was not nearly so simple as they had at first imagined, and, although furious at the continued losses, were completely mystified as to the cause. But now the feverish gambling spirit had taken such hold of them that they staked their watches, chains, rings, and even their scarf-pins, in the vain hope of recovering their money. At last they were thoroughly cleaned out—"detective" and all—but even then they would not give in. They insisted on us accompanying them into Edinburgh in the cab they had in waiting at no great distance, and agreed to "play the game out"

—after sending one of their number to their lodging for the remainder of their joint saving—in any public-house we chose to name. We selected one in Richmond Street, and were driven there; and very soon the money was brought, and the same process was repeated without the slightest variation. Pound after pound, sovereign after sovereign, shilling after shilling, of the sharpers went sliding into the pocket of “The Prince,” till they were again cleaned out; and then he boldly offered to stake good money against bad, and in the same way relieved them of every flash note and counterfeit coin in their possession. Nor was that all. Having cleaned them out, he was determined to have some fun with them. The fine black coats on their backs had caught his eye, and to the amusement of all present—for we had purposely chosen a public room—he offered to stake half his winnings against the four coats. In an evil moment they snatched at the offer. The four coats were taken off and placed beside his stake, and then they played—and lost!

The four satin hats followed in the same way, then the four waistcoats, then two ivory-handled silk umbrellas, and then he stopped with the remark—

“I don’t think I’ll win any more; the trousers you may retain. You thought to sharp me because I came from the North, but you would require to get up a little earlier in the day;” and then, perfectly unmoved by their murderous oaths and threats, he proceeded to dispose of the coats, hats, waistcoats, flash jewellery, and umbrellas by auction at a cheap rate among the spectators.

How the gang got away through the streets hatless, and in only their shirts and trousers, I don’t know; but this I do know, they made “The Prince” a magnificent offer if he would only join them. But “The Prince,” as the reader knows, was already engaged where he could not possibly disappoint, and so was compelled to decline. But the “routing out” was effectual. The sharpers vanished from Edinburgh as if the earth had swallowed them; and if they are still to the fore, and should sight this, they may discover in it something to sharpen their wits upon.

The next day I forwarded “The Prince’s” winnings—minus the flash notes and counterfeit coins, which were destroyed—to an address in London. They amounted to one hundred and fifty-three pounds, ten shillings, and sixpence in all—a very fair morning’s work.

When he was tried we kept faith with him, and really got the charge made light for him. The stealing of the letter was not brought forward against him at all, and he got off with the very light sentence of one year's imprisonment.

But we were repeatedly pestered with him afterwards, as has been indicated by his connection with the Maclusky gang; and I shall notice him again further **on.**

A MOTHER'S LOVE.

THERE must be few of my readers who have not thought, in some lull in their struggle for an existence, how short, after all, is our life here. We are boys, we are sweethearts, we are fathers, we are grandfathers, and then a grave stops the way. And yet, short as is the dream, there are some so utterly borne down by trials, sins, and sorrows, as to wish it shorter, and hail its close with a weary, weary cry of delight. Nor is it always the guilty and erring who are taken, and the innocent who are left. Perhaps in a Detective's stories it should be so; but every one using his eyes knows that it is not so, and I aim more at leaving impressions exactly as they have been left on me than at merely amusing the reader.

Simple as are the following details, they are imprinted on my memory in glowing and vivid colours, which neither time nor change has been able to efface. Amid all the fevered scurry of guilt, misery, and agony that has swept past me, two scenes in the following sketch have never left me. I have dreamt them over again by night, and seen them by day; and the chill winter, with its driving snowflakes, glowing lights, rattling carriages, and happy parties, never comes creeping round without reminding me of this instance of a mother's love.

Over in one of those main-door houses in Castle Street, one afternoon in June, two persons were conversing earnestly—I should say bitterly; for though their ideas were couched in the politest language, every word slashed deeply. The persons were Colonel Bruce, aged forty-five, and his young and pretty wife, aged exactly twenty-three. The room was the dining-room, facing the street in front, where a cab was drawn up before the door; and as I afterwards saw it, I can say that everything that lavish wealth could procure was there. One thing, however, which money cannot always buy, was absent—that was happiness. The altercation got hotter, and the voices louder, till even the attention of the stolid cabman outside was attracted. The quarrel was caused by no mere passing cloud—

it was only one out of dozens, the growth of weeks upon weeks, months upon months. The truth was, that the two were not only ill-assorted in years, but in disposition as well. The Colonel was stern, thoughtful, and retiring; his young wife was gay—almost giddy,—fond of company, dress, and a continual whirl of amusements. They had been four years married, and, after the birth of their one child, had spent one year of uninterrupted happiness; but then clouds came. I do not know what brought them—perhaps something very simple—a harsh word or an angry look; but I know what caused them to settle and deepen. A worthless, needy scamp—who shall only appear here as a nameless shadow, that he may go down forgotten and unknown to the oblivion he deserves—came in the way, and with his handsome exterior and subtle words, turned the head of the pretty young wife. There was a double mistake: in the first place, judging her husband by his stern exterior, coupled perhaps with an occasional rebuke or harsh word, she thought him heartless and unloving; and in the second, the smiling exterior of the handsome young villain utterly blinded her to the foul intention beneath. The error in both cases was frightful, as I shall now show.

The pretty young wife was dressed for a drive, and said the most cutting things, after woman's fashion, while she daintily buttoned her gloves, or readjusted her bonnet; while the Colonel, seated on a couch near the window, with a book in his hand, leant forward with a fury and terrible passion in his face that might have made a whole army quake with fear.

"Woman!" burst forth the infuriated husband, "if you are unhappy—chained, as you say you are, to a man without a soul—why not put an end to your unhappiness? Why not agree to a separation?"

For the first time a change—a kind of spasm—dimmed the forced, defiant smile on the lady's face, and she chokingly cried—

"Why? Because I am a *mother*. To leave you would be happiness—joy. But to leave the child—oh, heaven!" and the gloved hand swept the air wildly, "why did I not die before she was born?"

"Why, indeed?" echoed the husband, white with excitement, "or before my eyes were cursed with seeing you—before I picked you up and gave you a fortune and a love which alike you have thrown to the winds. A mother! Base, worthless woman! lost to shame and every feeling of honour. you

disgrace the name. If I only dared, I would kill you with my own hands!" and he hurled the book in his hand straight in her face.

The hard, square missile flew through the air, and as she reared herself haughtily and unswerving, it caught her on the mouth, cutting the lip deeply inside against her teeth. The blood flowed down unheeded over her fair chin and the pure white laces beneath. She glared at him steadily, with whitened cheeks and gleaming eyes, retiring slowly towards the door.

"I had almost prayed that this might be our last quarrel," she slowly and distinctly got out, "but you have severed the last tie. There is blood between us now, but death itself will be between us before we meet again. All the world is not cruel, and perhaps one at least may be found to shield and protect me."

With this parting stinger, she was gone, and the door closed, leaving him white and petrified. I scarcely think that up to that time an elopement had really been arranged, but if it had, this unfortunate rupture must have quickened the arrangement. Disdaining to wipe away the trickling blood, the lady called her maid, and very coolly proceeded to pack up her jewels and a few articles of wardrobe. Exclamations and timid questions alike were met with a haughty stare and rearing of the head that cowed the words on the girl's lips, and then the lady swept down the stair again, bearing her own luggage, as swiftly as if hell itself were behind her and heaven before. Only once did she pause, and that was on one of the landings, where a run of tiny footsteps caught her ear, coupled with the word "Mamma."

For half a second she swayed and hesitated, as the girl, watching her over the banisters, could see; and then before the nursery door could open, she had torn herself away, and was gone through the lobby and out to the street with a rush. The cabman stared, though not quite unprepared for the spectacle. His vehicle had been hired for a pleasure drive; but now his fare came flying out, all bloody and scared, and with a fearful glance backwards, that gave her more the look of a thief than of a lady coming out of her own house.

"Away! away!—drive away!" hoarsely cried the lady, determinedly averting her head from the house she had left, as if afraid of a glimpse of a tiny form which might overturn all. "Quick, man! or it may be too late!"

"Yes, ma'am; where to?"

"Anywhere!—out of the city—away from this charnel-house of hypocrisy! No, stay; drive first to Rutland Square. I must see him before I go;" and the last words were uttered as if to herself, though the man heard and noted every word.

"All right, ma'am."

Whoop—whirr—and they were off; and a husband and wife were separated for life! That is all! The world grins at the news, and even gloatingly dwells on all the details it can lay its claws on. But the two concerned? Ah! well, let them fold their arms over their seared hearts and withered hopes, and smile bravely. It is their only chance, if they would be let alone. Time rolls on, steady and remorseless, sweeping us all before him like straws before the rushing torrent; and at the longest the end is not far.

"Is Mr M'Govan at home?"

The words were addressed to me at the door of my own house a few nights after the events I have described. I had answered the bell myself, and in the gloom of the stair did not at first recognise the gentleman who spoke any more than he did me. But as soon as I had shown him in, I found that I had seen him often about Parliament House, and he in a sort of way seemed also to recognise me. His card now informed me that his name was Charles Bruce, and that he was a solicitor; but the first inkling of his business with me came when he deliberately unfolded a local newspaper, which at that time had a liking for such items, and pointed to a column headed "SCANDAL IN HIGH LIFE."

"You have read this, or heard of the unfortunate business?" he inquiringly began.

"I have—both read that and heard of it," I gravely returned. "Is your business in any way connected with it?"

"It is; but as the whole is rather a delicate matter, I thought best to come to you privately. I am brother to the gentleman principally concerned, who, you must have guessed, is Colonel Bruce, in Castle Street; and as he has entrusted the whole to me, I will first give you a clear, unbiased account of all that took place, and then tell you what is the service that the Colonel requires."

What he said I need not repeat, as I have already given a condensed account of the same; but the service required was both curious and interesting, and at once showed the noble heart and deep affection dwelling beneath the Colonel's stern and unbending exterior.

"Undoubtedly there has been an elopement," continued the lawyer, "for the cab duly arrived at his residence in Rutland Street, where it remained in waiting for some time, and then conveyed both to the railway station, where they took out tickets for London. Now, what my brother wishes is this. He does not wish her brought back, or exposed, or annoyed in any way—says, indeed, that the woman who requires chaining or force to keep at her husband's side is utterly worthless, and welcome to go. But still, she is the mother of his child, and still, I may say in confidence to you, he loves her deeply and devotedly, as only such a man can love. More: he blames himself with being harsh and even cruel in his moments of passion, and so finds a hundred excuses for her. And, believe me, though outwardly he appears to the world unmoved and smiling, inwardly he suffers as none can conceive. I know that if a change does not come it will kill him. Now, about this woman. He says that she is too refined and intelligent not to discover soon the frightful mistake she has made in estimating the character of her paramour. By and by her money will run done, her jewels will all go, and then a rupture will come. She will be cast off, deserted, tossed off, to be hooted at and spit upon by the world. Now, here is where my brother's affection comes in. He can never see her again, but he cannot bear the thought of one reared in luxury being hunted down to starvation, sin, or death. He wishes a watch to be kept upon all their movements, and, the moment the rupture comes, an ample provision in money to be placed at her disposal."

"He is very good, and I will be most happy to do all in my power to further such object," I replied, after some moments' thought. "But that is more the work of a private detective. I am the paid servant of the city, and must hold myself in readiness to do its work."

"Very true; I knew as much when I came. But you may, perhaps, be able to recommend a man fitted for the work. Of course, every expense reasonably incurred would be defrayed, and a liberal fee allowed as well."

Now my brow cleared, for there I really could help him; and after giving him the address of a friend of my own, we parted, and I saw him no more for months. But I heard, in an incidental way, how the case was getting on. Slips came dropping in to me, first from London, then from several of the fashionable watering-places in succession, then from Brighton.

and finally from the Isle of Wight, where the shifting about ceased for some months. Of course, I got a mere hint of how things were going; all the minute details went to the gentleman who employed my friend.

But I had got interested in the case—not through prying curiosity, but in the deepest way, by feeling for the parties concerned, and during all those months I could not help watching and studying the bearing of the deserted husband. I met him often, driving about, jaunting to the country by rail, promenading our streets, or in West Princes Street Gardens, always in company with his little girl—always smiling, stately, and cool. The world pronounced him happy—well rid of a bad bargain; but the world is ignorant, mad, blind, and, as usual, was completely deceived. It saw the smiles, but failed to note or account for the wasting form, stooping gait, and pallid cheeks, or the terrible look of agony which would occasionally flit across his face at some smile or artless word from his child. And so the months trailed on, and the two appeared seldomer and seldomer abroad, till at last I missed them altogether; and then it came to my ears that the Colonel was suffering from bad health, and confined to bed.

Early in December the long-looked-for rupture came. Mr Bruce, the Colonel's brother, appeared one day in great dismay and chagrin, and placed the following telegrams in my hand which he had just received from my friend:—

“The quarrels have come to something at last. To night he struck, kicked, and ill-used her, and he is off to Baden-Baden, leaving her without a penny and a heavy bill to pay. Please telegraph orders.”

The second was more startling, and ran thus:—

“She has given me the slip. Gone off without a rag, leaving a note to the effect that a few trinkets she left behind would pay the bill she owed. Don't know where to look for her, nor what things she had on when she left. Off on the hunt, and will send word the moment I get clue. Please advise.”

I stared at the two flimsies—one bearing a date only a few hours later than the other—and then at the blank face of the lawyer, and scarcely needed to wait for the question that was written there—

“Well, what is to be done?”

“Two things,” I answered, after a long pause. “In the first place, you may advertise in all the papers likely to come in her way. You know best how to word the thing, and put

it in so delicate a way that even a frail woman, with fine tender-strung feelings, who may, perhaps, imagine that she is a wronged woman, cannot take offence at it, or curse the hand that offers aid. The second matter applies to the second telegram. He says he does not know where to look for her. I do. Where is the pole-star of her affections? What magnet was it that, even according to your own account, made her swerve and hesitate in leaving her husband, and her home, and almost pulled her back from the rash act? It was her child. Take my word for it, there is a force in that simple little word that will draw her back to Edinburgh, though mountains, seas, and continents stood between."

"But she has no money—friends—nothing."

"Money!" I warmly echoed. "She is a mother—that is enough!"

The grave face before me at last brightened faintly with hope; and there was something like emotion quivering through his voice as he cried—

"Mr M'Govan, I believe in what you have laid down; but there is one other possibility, and the idea of it is killing my brother: she may commit suicide."

"She may; but not till she has seen her child," I promptly replied. "Tell your brother that: it may at least console him, though it should turn out a mistaken idea, of which I am by no means certain."

"And you, if you should see or hear anything of her, would you—?"

"I shall do everything in my power to assist you," I said, taking the faint request out of his mouth, and shaking his outstretched hand. "Keep your brother quiet as best you can; we will probably hear of her before another week is gone."

Next day the principal local and provincial papers contained the following announcement:—

"If Amy Grant, otherwise M. B., who left her home in Castle Street, Edinburgh, in June last, and was lately resident in the —Hotel, Isle of Wight, will communicate with Charles Bruce, solicitor, Queen Street, Edinburgh, she will hear of something to her advantage."

I need scarcely say that this advertisement, vague and meaningless though it might appear to the general reader, was looked through and through by the inquisitive eyes of the Edinburgh gentry. And then there was such a lifting of hands, and screwing of faces, and perking and sniffing of noses, and such pity for "the poor misguided man, who could ever

dream of making provision for such a base, worthless woman!" The wonder is that the noses ever came back to shape again, or that the flounced skirts that had touched such characters were ever again considered pure. Ah! the hounds! that can lick, and fawn, and cringe when one is on their own level, but fall on and rend to pieces a man or woman the moment they are down! Hounds, did I call them?—I disgrace the noble animal by the comparison.

But the advertisements brought no response. Others appeared, even more earnestly and touchingly worded, and with a like result. They thought that perhaps the eyes that the communications were intended for had never lighted on them; but I was inclined to attribute the silence to a different cause. And so a week passed, bringing with it snow, slush, and frost, and at last something else.

I had been over at Greenside, hovering about the Theatre Royal, looking out for some pickpockets who had arrived for the pantomime season, and was meditatively tramping back and forward in the shade further down, near York Place, when I caught sight of a strange, trailing figure slinking up from the direction of the London Road, and pausing in hesitation before approaching the glare of light up in front of the theatre. It was a woman dressed in the flimsiest of rags, and with a tawdry black shawl drawn over her head, and nearly concealing her face. I cannot well describe her walk. She limped painfully at every step, and evidently dragged herself over the ground with the greatest effort; but it was something which I can only call a fearful slink that particularly drew my eyes to her. She appeared afraid of being seen—afraid of seeing herself. I watched her attentively, for my professional instincts were roused, and I had seen many a case come out of a less significant circumstance. Her resolution was quickly taken—she would not face the light, but limped slowly across the street into York Place. I crossed too, after a moment, and watched her trailing up the retired street, wondering if she were one of my "bairns," and only taking a roundabout way of getting into the theatre. But no; she kept steadily on for Queen Street, without even glancing up Broughton towards the theatre; and as there was something wild and strange in her whole aspect, I resolved to follow and watch. The task was not a difficult one, for she neither looked right, nor left, nor behind, but pressed on, on towards Castle Street. The light snow was blasting full in her face, and driving her thin rags out in long points behind;

but she neither cowered before it, nor slackened her determined limping. I was on the other side, and a little distance behind ; but in spite of darkness and driving snow I had made the discovery that the woman I was following was walking on *bare feet*.

"God help the poor girl !" I thought. "That accounts for her limping, and perhaps for her avoidance of the brightly-lighted front street as well. Where is she going now?"

She had swerved sharply into North Castle Street, and as I paused I saw her start back, with hands clasped tight over her **breast**, and cower away across the street from the streaming lights in Colonel Bruce's windows. The front door was open ; and close to the kerb a cab was drawn up, as if in waiting for some one. The poor straggler I was watching slunk back again across the street—this time *behind* the cabman, and by and by was clutching the rails leading up to the next stair, and gazing with distended eyes into the bay window of the Colonel's dining-room. The slots of the Venetian blind, by some oversight, had been left open, and thus everything taking place in the room could be clearly discerned from without. I got over exactly opposite, and watched quite as intently as the poor waif clutching the railings, and now began to quiver with excitement as a dim perception of the truth at last broke on my mind. I could see but one person in the room—the Colonel himself, stretching himself languidly and weariedly on a sofa, and propped up with pillows. A reading-stand was at his elbow, but it had been shoved aside ; and now his eyes rested wistfully on the outline of a picture hanging on the opposite wall, draped and covered with crape. There was an awful change in his appearance ; his face was a mere shadow—thin, worn and gaunt, and white as the snow falling on us outside. All at once a piteous look came into his features, his head drooped into his hands, and so he remained, quivering and shaking. But there was a sudden interruption. The door flew open, and a little girl of three and a-half years, completely dressed for a children's ball, ran in, with outstretched arms and beaming face, and made straight for the sofa. A moan, so sharp and sudden as to startle even me, broke from the poor straggler clinging to the rails outside, and the cabman looked nervously round on every side till his eyes rested on my figure opposite. At any other time I would have walked off, or changed my ground, but now I was chained to the spot. The sick man, with every look of pain and sadness chased from his face, half raised

himself, lifted the child bodily in his arms, and passionately kissed its bright and blooming face. The poor waif without bent forward, clutching the rails with a terrible rigidity, till nearly half her body was over the spikes, with the tawdry shawl slipping back unheeded from her face, and a wild, hungry look in her eyes that will haunt me to my dying day. A ruddy gleam from within shone full on her white face, tangled hair, and clenched hands ; and the swirling snow and cold wind tore at her unfelt and unheeded, for there she hung, motionless, breathless—a living statue. Only once did the smile die on the sick man's lips, and that was when the child spoke something into his ear, and pointed hesitatingly to the picture covered with crape ; but the spasm was gone or concealed in a moment, and the nurse appeared, shawled and caped ; and with another kiss the bright little fairy was lifted in her arms and carried from the room. My eyes now went eagerly and quickly to the open lobby. The eyes of the waif were already there. The moment's pause appeared an age, even to me ; but from my position I could see the two before the other and more eager watcher. The nurse, bearing the miniature little lady in her arms, motioned to the cabman to open the cab door and put down the steps before she emerged into the blustering wind and snow. The poor waif saw the cabman's movements, guessed what was near, and for the first time for some minutes, moved slightly. In another moment the nurse hurried out, cowering before the driving flakes ; but short as was the distance to the open and inviting shelter of the cab, she did not reach it. A wild shriek of delight burst suddenly from the poor straggler who shortly before had been so timid and fearful. With one bound and a great clutch she had the child in her arms, strained to her breast, and kissed with a passionate fervour which, it seemed, could never be satisfied.

"Ah—ha ! ha ! ha !—my child, my child ! my own darling !" she cried, with a wild hysterical burst of laughter and tears ; and then the hugging and kissing were renewed in a way and with a wild joy that drew a succession of terrified screams from the petrified nurse and the frightened child.

"Woman ! how dare you !" the nurse at last found breath to say, making a snatch to recover the child.

"How dare I !" was the impassioned reply ; and the shawl of the waif dropped to the ground, her dark hair drifted forward with the wind, and her right hand cut desperately through the driving snow. "How dare I ! I am her mother !"

"Help ! help ! murder !" screamed the nurse, dashing forward and again making a desperate attempt to wrench her treasure from the strange woman's grasp.

There was a rush from within, and a tall, scared shadow of a man appeared in the doorway. The Colonel had heard the outcry, and found strength to rush to the door to ascertain the cause. As the sick man turned round full in the light, the waif shrank back, and the nurse regained her treasure without a struggle.

"Ah ! that man !" came out sharply between the wanderer's teeth, and, with one gleaming look backwards, and her clenched hand shaken vengefully at the astonished group, she was gone into the snow, like a spirit of the storm suddenly made invisible.

I rushed across the street and reached the Colonel's side just as the sobbing child was making this explanation—

"An awful woman—she squeezed me tight, and said she was my mamma."

The Colonel staggered, while his colour instantly changed to a deathly white, and gripped hard at the stone lintel of the door for support. I caught him in my arms, and, with the help of the cabman, bore him into the house, and then whispered a moment in his ear.

"Thanks, thanks !" he faintly gasped. "Follow her—see where she goes ; but do not—do not—speak to her or annoy her. I—I—will pay anything—all expenses—only see where she goes."

I rushed off, but I had lost some valuable moments ; and the chance, for that night at least, was gone. I returned before midnight, utterly worn out and exhausted, and completely baffled as well. I found things much worse than when I left. The Colonel had burst a blood-vessel, and was now being supported in the arms of his brother and a medical man, while he let his life out in great mouthfuls.

Next morning the following advertisement, inserted after hours as a great favour, appeared in all the morning papers :—

"To MRS BRUCE—Woman, return, if only for an hour. Your husband is *dying*."

"CHARLES BRUCE."

I was out the whole day on the hunt, but it was night before I came on my clue. A lady, a perfect stranger to her, but not a stranger to feeling, had found her fainting on the

street; had forced her, in spite of her entreaties to be left alone, into a cab; driven her to her own home, and then, like a good Samaritan, bound up her wounds and bruises, fed her like a child, and with motherly tenderness tucked her cosily into the first bed she had slept in for more than a week, when, after a wild burst of gratitude, she had sobbed herself asleep. She was still weak and feverish when I was introduced to her; but at last, after crying quietly for some time, she consented to accompany me to her husband's bedside. We half carried her down into the cab, and then drove off noiselessly over the soft snow. There was no storm now, but in its place the clear sparkling stars and liquid moonlight above, and the shining white mantle of purity covering the dark city below. My companion sobbed quietly till we reached Castle Street, when such an overpowering fit of agitation seized her that I thought she was going to faint before I could get her out. The Colonel's brother received us kindly and joyously; and leaving the lady for a moment, we entered the sick chamber together, just as another lawyer came out, bundling and tying up a number of papers as he did so. The ominous sign did not escape my eye; but before my inquiring look could be answered we were in the room. The Colonel was propped up on a sofa, but lying so still and white that at first I started, thinking he was dead. But no; to our surprise he opened his eyes, and raised himself to look up in our faces.

"Some one has come?" he faintly exclaimed. "Ah! you here!" and he started violently as he recognised me. "She has come at last. Bring—bring—her in."

We brought in the drooping figure. There was a low wail, a weary cry of delight, and then they were clasped in each other's arms. But then the poor waif drooped, and drooped, till she was cowering in a grovelling heap before the couch of the dying man.

"Don't—don't—Amy!" he faintly gasped out. "The past—bury it! Ah! I am dying now, and perhaps it is best. Amy, I have left you all. Swear—swear—on your bended knees to remain pure henceforth, and I will leave you—leave you my child."

"Heaven is my witness!" cried the poor mother, in a wild burst of grief, raising her eyes to heaven; "I swear it!"

"Ah! I can die now—so happy—so happy!" murmured the dying man, resting wearily on her breast. "And you will forgive all my—?"

"Hush—hush!" cried the startled woman, looking fearfully around. "Forgive me."

"I did months ago. That is past—past. The world will hoot over my grave, but I will not hear: I will be at peace, where there is no sin."

There was a long pause, broken only by the stifled sobs of those present; and then the dying man, with a mighty effort, motioned to the window.

"Let me—let me—see out," he gasped, with painful slowness; and then his couch was gently moved close to the window, and the blinds drawn up.

An eager brightness came into his fast-glazing eyes as they travelled away out on the sloping housetops of the sleeping city, gleaming white and pure in the clear moonlight, with their yellow lights shining in clusters and long rows, like earthly stars trying to rival the clear sparkle of those twinkling in the dark heaven above.

"Ah, Edinburgh! beautiful, cruel, cold-hearted city!" murmured the dying man, as he sank back. "It has killed me—torn out my heart and trampled on it; but I still love it. Darker—darker! Pray—pray! Oh, God! protect my child, and my—my—wife!" and with this whisper lingering on his lips, he sank back and lay still.

Colonel Bruce was dead.

It was only by main force we could tear the mother and child from the room; and even then it was doubtful if *both* were not likely to follow. For two years a lady, always dressed in mourning and deeply veiled, went to and fro blessing the dark places of our city with her presence, her advice, and her fortune. She never saw company; hundreds among the wealthy even affected not to know who she was; but she left a ray of sunshine behind her which still brightens many a poor abode. I can say no more without revealing the identity of the lady.

She died two years after her husband of consumption. She was buried, at her own request, without name or mark, down in Rosebank Cemetery; but I know that lately a brilliant young lady, just returned from being educated in France, went down, searched out the spot, and placed a wreath of *immortelles* on the grave. She was accompanied by her uncle, and that uncle's name was Charles Bruce.

THE MAGIC PORTMANTEAUS.

BETWEEN the two classes, the honest and well-doing and the thievish and criminal, there floats a great mass who may be said to belong properly to neither, and who may be set down as silly dreamers. These infatuated beings dream of wealth when they should be working for it, and take every means but the straightforward one to get it. They try lotteries, spells, charms, and gambling-wheels, and look upon such advertisements as "A fortune for a trifle," "£20,000 for £1," as perfect god-sends. Reason and they have parted and gone off by different roads, never to meet more. The man in the following case might have been equally unteachable; but then he was caught young, and something more than a mere exposure accompanied the lesson; and perhaps, should he see this account of the affair, he will be the first to smile at the incidents, and admit the folly of his own actions.

Some time before the following incidents took place—which was in the month of November—a Glasgow manufacturer of cheap portmanteaus happened to turn out some scores of a particular pattern, exactly alike outwardly and inwardly. What became of all these scores, and what comic complications and mistakes they may have led to, does not concern us here. We have only to note the destination and history of two. One of the portmanteaus went to Dundee; the other found its way to Edinburgh. One of them, after standing among a pile at a shop-door ticketed twelve shillings, with an invisible elevenpence three farthings pencilled after the twelve, was sold to a customer, who considered he had got a bargain when he got the seller to knock off the odd farthings. The other, after standing about the same time, was sold for nine shillings and ninepence. By what process of reasoning the twelve-and-elevenpenny gentleman could convince himself that he was honest, when another could live on so much smaller a profit, is not for me to inquire. It is a trade secret; and observation has long since convinced me that in this fast age the gauge for a man's profits is not the old-

fashioned one of conscience, but simply his own personal expenditure. If that be moderate, the customer is honestly dealt with; if it be extravagant, then woe betide!

The man who bought the portmanteau in Dundee was William Bell, a working man, aged twenty-four. Bell was most emphatically a dreamer, and superstitious beyond belief. He was rather a good-looking fellow, and had got the silly idea into his head that a red sun-burned face and dusty moleskins were things to be ashamed of, and that he would never be happy till some lucky turn in the wheel of fortune made him a gentleman—that is, allowed him to walk about in black clothes doing nothing all day but twirl a gold-headed cane. With this idea he had carefully gone over the entire list of his relatives—more particularly those who chanced to be aged, and were not likely to linger long in this world of troubles—to see if there was any likelihood of him being at any time called upon to heir their wealth. The survey did not give much promise, as they were mostly in humble circumstances like himself; but to a dreamer this was nothing. He soon reared an airy fabric of hope in his own mind, and then took to feeling and bribing the postman, in the belief that that would bring him all the sooner the lucky letter that was to make him a gentleman. The letters, however, that did come were never of the right kind; and when they only breathed forth an affectionate concern for his wellbeing, true friendship, or kind sympathy, he tossed them aside in disgust, and turned for solace to “Napoleon’s Book of Fate.”

About this time trade chanced to get dull; and after losing most of his spare cash in various lotteries, he at last invested the remainder in the portmanteau aforesaid, and decided on a journey to Edinburgh. By consulting his “Book of Fate,” and going through a roundabout process of picking open the edges of a closed book, and then reading the first word that caught his eye, he had got at something like the following message: “You shall go a journey; iron shall become gold, and your eyes shall be dazzled.” What could be plainer than that? Evidently a fortune awaited him at Edinburgh; so, packing up his tools in their box, and leaving them to be forwarded by the goods train, he put up a few tools, an old shirt or two, a couple of combs, and a bit of soap, in the portmanteau, took out a ticket for Edinburgh at the East Station, and was soon rattling away on his journey.

In this world, it is said, two persons are often born and

brought up miles from each other, and without the slightest idea of each other's existence, who, nevertheless, are to be brought together from opposite directions to a point where they are to meet and bring about the most surprising results.

This is called fate—a nice, handy word for easy-minded people. The fate, therefore, of William Bell was now looming in the distance, and with every rattle of the train coming nearer the dreamy minded youth. That fate was the other portmanteau.

Thomas M'Kinnon, sole agent and traveller for a pushing firm of jewellers in Edinburgh, took his place in the train at Perth, with a third-class ticket for Edinburgh in his pocket, about the time that the dreamer Bell started from Dundee. M'Kinnon was a great, powerful man, six feet high at least, and rather quick-tempered and passionate; added to which circumstance he had dined and drank freely before starting, and had a fixed idea that every ninety-nine men out of a hundred that he met were thieves and rogues. In his hand he carried the black portmanteau, with glazed sides and brass knobs, which he had purchased at Edinburgh specially for the round; and in the innermost compartment of his purse he carried the key of the said portmanteau, with which he had carefully locked it at the hotel before starting. At the station a porter had run forward to carry the portmanteau to the luggage van, but he not only received a rough refusal, but nearly got his nose flattened as well by the red-faced and excitable traveller.

"No, I'm an old traveller—I'm not to be robbed," he sharply growled, as he carefully stowed away the portmanteau under the seat of the carriage, looking round fiercely on every other passenger as he did so. "If there's a thief in this carriage, I beg to assure him that he'll have a difficulty in robbing me. I look after everything myself, and never trust my goods out of my sight. Yes, he will be a clever rogue that does me;" and with these words he produced a big cigar, which with some difficulty he succeeded in lighting, and then coolly, after the manner of travelling smokers, proceeded to choke and stifle therewith every one else in the carriage.

The glossy portmanteau under the seat contained a number of gold watches—some going to Edinburgh to be cleaned and repaired, and others perfectly new,—a varied assortment of brooches, bracelets, and other trinkets; and two valuable tilt carriage clocks; so that Mr M'Kinnon's sharpness was not

altogether uncalled for. The only drawback was, that, having been drinking, he was not quite qualified to make good his words and display his boasted keenness. He managed, however, to make himself so intensely disagreeable to every one in the carriage, that by the time the train reached Ladybank Junction, he was politely requested to leave the carriage and accommodate himself in a smoking compartment. The Dundee portion of the train being late, Mr M'Kinnon strode the platform for some time, portmanteau in hand, adding his quota to the million of curses that have already been heaped on this miserable station by representatives of every clime and tongue. Then, as the weary wait swelled out to half-an-hour, he varied the monotony by quarrelling with a railway porter, and nearly knocking his head off. At last the luckless train bearing William Bell appeared, and was shunted into its place; and, with a ruthless grasp at the first third-class door-handle that appeared, Mr M'Kinnon thrust his portmanteau into the carriage—right in among a lot of legs, the foremost of which happened to belong to our Dundee dreamer. He, too, had kept his portmanteau under his seat for safety, but, in the sudden thrust at his legs, had no time to note that the portmanteau of the traveller so closely resembled his own. The thing was thrust in, displacing and taking up the exact spot of room which had held his own; and then he saw that Mr M'Kinnon was glaring at him insolently through the gloom, and expecting him to give place in the same way.

"If it's all the same to you," the traveller snappishly remarked, "I'll sit here—next to the door."

"You can sit where you like," was the cold reply; "but as for me, I feel quite comfortable where I am, and don't mean to move."

M'Kinnon was about to begin an insolent reply, when he was suddenly shoved forward by a ticket collector from behind, and told to take his seat and show his ticket, as the train was already behind time. A wrathful and exciting scene followed, in which M'Kinnon did seat himself, but so angrily and confusedly that he quite forgot the exact locality of his portmanteau; and feeling vaguely for it, was quite satisfied that all was right when he pulled out one exactly the same in appearance and weight. He had twice visited the refreshment-room while waiting, and his utterance was now, in consequence, a little indistinct; but as he glared suspiciously round on the other passengers, with his foot on what he believed to be his own

portmanteau, he managed to growl out, in the most insolent tones he could assume—

“I tell you what it is, if there’s a thief in this carriage he’ll find it a difficult job to do me. I’m up to a thing or two, and the man that robs me may consider himself clever.”

This remark elicited no reply from any one; but, as M’Kinnon, in savagely trying to light a cigar, allowed his foot to slip off the portmanteau and heavily down on Bell’s toes, the accident soon opened up a lively conversation between the two, in the course of which Bell firmly expressed an opinion that he (M’Kinnon) was the biggest thief and rogue at that moment in the carriage.

“Very good; I’ll keep an eye on you,” thickly returned M’Kinnon. “I shall give you in charge for defamation when we get to the next station.”

“And I shall give you in charge for smoking in a carriage not set apart for that purpose,” firmly replied Bell; and then the two held a long argument as to whether the carriage was or was not a smoking one, and after wrangling in a hoarse shriek for nearly half-an-hour, they separated as far as the length of the seat would allow of, each believing the other a scoundrel, and each looking sharply after what he believed to be his own luggage. As they neared the station at Burntisland, the traveller fell asleep, and Bell, glad of the chance, hastily took the portmanteau under him and left the carriage for the ferry-boat. A minute after, the guard woke the sleeping traveller, and he also seized what, being under him, he believed to be his own portmanteau, and made his way down the pier, cursing them for clanging noisily at the bell instead of giving him time for a visit to the refreshment-rooms. It was now perfectly dark; and as Bell had slipped down to the steerage the moment he had gone on board, it is no wonder that M’Kinnon saw no more of him during the journey. Up at the railway station at Waverley Bridge, however, just as he had stepped into a cab, and placed his valuable portmanteau on the seat opposite him, he caught sight of Bell’s face for a moment in the crowd, and heard a porter say to him, evidently in reply to a question—

“A cheap hotel? Oh, gang up to the High Street—that’s about the best place.”

That was all M’Kinnon heard, and he thought nothing of it at the time, though, before long, the words were to rise to considerable importance in his estimation. The cab drove off

at a rapid pace, he being anxious to present himself at his employer's place of business and relieve himself of his valuable freight before closing hours.

Mear while Bell, wishing to ascertain definitely what part of the town he was likely to be employed in before taking a fixed lodging, found his way up to an hotel in High Street, where, after engaging a bedroom for the night, he proceeded to wash himself as a refresher before tea. This accomplished, he put his hand in his pocket, brought out a key, and unlocked his portmanteau, to procure the necessary comb and brush for his hair. The key fitted and worked exactly, as it had always done, and as he had confidently expected it to do; but the moment the portmanteau was drawn open, wonder of wonders! the contents changed into flashing gold! The first parcel that came to hand, which should have been a ragged shirt encasing a number of new mason's chisels, was of fine tissue paper, and contained a number of gold brooches and ear-rings, the very flashing of which in the gas-light made the very heart of Bell sicken with joy. But this was only a beginning; for, lo! when the next parcel was opened, it revealed a beautiful morocco case containing three splendid gold watches. Then came a heavy parcel of silver spoons and forks, then more watches, gold and silver, till the floor actually seemed to sway under the astonished mason's feet, and he was constrained to ask himself if his senses had not left him.

"Good heavens! is it possible? Has my gold charm actually worked after all, and turned my tools into all these? The portmanteau is undoubtedly my own," he continued, after a close scrutiny. "It has never been a moment out of my possession, and I had it firmly locked all the time. It must be magic! There is something in a charm, after all. But, perhaps, this is all a dream—perhaps I'm fast asleep just now, and will wake presently to find myself back in my lodging in Dundee, jumping up to find myself late for the train."

He gave himself a tremendous pinch in the leg, knocked his head violently against the wall, dipped his face in the wash-basin, and looked once more in the direction of the glittering contents of the magic portmanteau; but, though he fully expected to find them gone, such was not the case. They still lay flashing in the light, with ravishing brilliance; and, what was still more intoxicating, when he came to more minutely examine one of the morocco cases, he found, safely and snugly stowed away inside, a thick bundle of bank-notes which looked

so real in their dirtiness and creases that he nearly leaped as high as the ceiling at the sight.

"I am rich!—a gentleman at last!" he murmured to himself: "and yet if I told any one of the simple charm that changed iron to gold, they would only laugh at me, and advise my friends to look to me as a lunatic. A lunatic? I can almost believe myself one now; yet there can be no doubt as to the reality of the change. Everything I had in the portmanteau has been turned to gold or silver, or their equivalent—these delicious, dirty bank-notes. But I must be satisfied: the whole may be a mere vision. I'll try if one of the notes will pass with the waiter."

Hastily stowing away his wealth in the magic portmanteau, he rang the bell, ordered a glass of beer, and then tendered with a shaking hand one of the bank-notes in payment. An interval of terrible suspense ensued; but at last the waiter reappeared and, without look or remark, tendered him the nineteen and eightpence of change, and left him once more alone. There could now be no doubt of his good fortune: there lay the hard, heavy metal received in change for the note. He bit it, weighed it in his hand, smelt at it, and even tasted it—yet it remained tangible and firm. As a final test, however, he took one of the gold watches, left the hotel, and found his way to a jeweller's on the Bridge, where he showed the watch and asked what was its real value. The shopman eyed him keenly, then opened the watch, read the name of an Edinburgh firm inside, and then sharply inquired—

"Were you wishing to sell the watch?"

Bell was frightened at the look and tone, which made him feel as guilty as a thief, and stammered out—

"Oh, no; I just wanted to know its real value—what it would sell for."

"The watch is perfectly new. Is it your own?" quietly pursued the jeweller.

"Yes; I have just got it—in a—yes, in a sort of a present, as it were."

"Ah! I understand;" and the jeweller smiled kindly and beamingly into Bell's face, at the same time sharply pressing an ornamental brass knob on the counter, which was followed by the sharp "ting" of a bell in the premises at the back. "Well, the selling price of the watch is £10, 10s., but it is scarcely possible that you would get the same for it over again. Have you had it long?"

"No—o—o, not very," was the hesitating reply. "I just got it to-day;" and he held his hand out to receive it back, but the jeweller had now fitted a glass to his eye, and appeared to be absorbed in a close examination of the works.

"Ah! you see, however short a time you may have had the watch, it must now rank as second-hand," he remarked; and then, much to the surprise of Bell, he entered into a minute description of the various kind of watches and their make, till a second 'ting' of the bell at the back was heard, when he abruptly handed back the watch to his visitor, and bade him good night.

Now, the moment the bell had sounded in the jeweller's workshop, an assistant tugged on his coat and ran out by a side-door, looking sharply on either side, till he reached the corner of the High Street, where he chanced to get his eye on M'Sweeny and myself talking to the policeman engaged in keeping the "lazy corner" clear for passengers.

"A suspicious character in our shop offering a gold watch for sale; keep an eye on him," was all he needed to say; and we got down to the shop door in time to see Bell come out, looking flushed and uneasy, it is true, but not at all like a thief or a robber in appearance.

"He is not one of our bairns," I said to M'Sweeny; "but he looks uneasy and fearful. Let us keep him in sight, and see what he is after."

Quite unconscious that he was being followed, Bell turned into the High Street, and appeared to gain courage as he advanced, for he was soon strutting along with all the airs of a prince of the blood, till at last I was a little surprised to see him turn into a cheap hotel and disappear.

"I thought a gentleman with all his airs would have put up in Princes Street at least," I laughingly remarked to M'Sweeny. "Well, he seems a harmless fool. Shall we go?"

"Not yet," said M'Sweeny, with a wink. "He has a raised look; p'raps he'll come out again, and try to lose some of his money about the High Street. Wait a minute till we see."

Meantime Mr M'Kinnon, who, as I have said, was in haste to get rid of his valuable freight, had by bribing the cabman been driven like fury along Princes Street to the chief establishment of his employer, and reached it in time to report progress to the principal of the firm himself. This gentleman, after taking down a formal entry of the business done by the traveller, and entering the same in the books, turned to the

stock-book to mark off the various articles as they were produced by Mr M'Kinnon from the portmanteau. The latter had 'straightened himself' to a tolerable degree by hastily swallowing a bottle of soda-water at Granton, and now produced his purse, took out a key, and unlocked the portmanteau.

"The watches first," he said, mechanically putting in his hand and lifting out a heavy parcel. "I sold only one of them, but I brought back three to repair and clean. Good heavens! what's this? An old linen shirt, very ragged! I did not put that into the portmanteau. I can swear I wrapped the case very carefully in tissue paper, and padded them with newspapers. Gracious goodness! a lot of mason's chisels! I've been robbed!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed his employer, springing forward in dismay. "Did you actually let the portmanteau out of your possession? I thought you at least would have known better."

"The portmanteau has never been for a moment out of my possession, and fast locked, and the key in my purse all the time," said M'Kinnon, paling with dismay. "There must be magic in it, for no thief could have opened the thing without me instantly detecting the attempt. Ha! here's an envelope—perhaps a letter explaining. No, it's only a small tooth-comb. Curses on it! how has the thing been done, and the portmanteau never a moment out of my sight? Here's a pair of striped cotton shirts, a moleskin jacket, and another comb. Something heavy down here wrapped in paper—perhaps one of the clocks. No, it's a mason's wooden mallet! Well, here is a mystery!" and, perfectly aghast, he straightened his back and stared blankly and helplessly in his employer's face.

"It is no mystery at all, I fear," gravely put in the jeweller. "You have got drunk again, and allowed the portmanteau to be tampered with. These things have evidently been put in merely to fill up and weight the portmanteau, for in themselves they are worthless."

"I was not drunk, nor could the case have been tampered with," earnestly returned M'Kinnon, too agitated to allow his passion to rise. "Ha! yes, it might have been done then," he added with a sudden start. "As the train was nearing Burntisland I felt a little tired, and allowed my eyes to close for a minute or two, but with my feet resting all the time on the portmanteau. One insolent young man sat on the same seat with me—a thievish-looking character, not unlike a mason in

appearance,—and it is just possible that he might have opened the case with a false key while my eyes were closed, and changed the contents for his own rubbish.”

“A very likely story!” cried the enraged jeweller; “you were drunk!—must have been. How could the man remove the things unless you had been senseless? and how are we possibly to lay hands on him now?”

“I have a clue. I heard him ask for a cheap hotel, and the porter at the station directed him to the High Street—the very place where such a man would seek to hide. I’ll find him, though I should have to tramp through every hotel and house to do it. Send word to the Police Office at once, while I take a cab over to the High Street and see what I can accomplish alone.”

He seemed so sensible and self-reliant that the jeweller was reluctantly compelled to let him take his own way. A cab was instantly called to take a messenger up to the Central Office, and at the same time rattle Mr M’Kinnon over the hotels further down the street. The third establishment which he chanced to enter was the right one, but unfortunately, at the moment he called, Bell was on the Bridge listening to the jeweller whose opinion he had sought regarding the gold watch.

“Did a young man put up here to-night, rather sunburned in the face, not unlike a mason in appearance?” he inquired at the bar, when he was instantly answered in the affirmative by the waiter who had changed the note for Bell so shortly before.

“No. 34,” he said, with business-like curtness. “Go right up. I think you will find him in his bedroom.”

M’Kinnon needed no second invitation. Up he ran till, in a dimly-lighted lobby, he found the bedroom numbered “34,” when he knocked sharply, and, receiving no reply, boldly threw open the door and entered. The room was empty, so far as a human being was concerned; but, though the light was turned down, M’Kinnon’s eye instantly sighted an object—propped on a chair and glistening at him through the dim light—which horrified and froze him into rigidity more than if it had been the ghost of his grandmother. He staggered slowly back towards the door, rubbed his eyes, and looked again. The ghostly object was still there; and he sank faintly and nervously into a chair.

“By all the fiends, there’s my portmanteau!—followed me

over all the way from Princes Street, and standing there as innocently as if nothing were wrong. I must be either haunted or mad! Let me think for a moment—let me think.”

But the more he thought the more incomprehensible did the thing become; and at last, with a superhuman effort, he dragged himself forward to the magic portmanteau, and stooping down, read the railway label stuck on the outside.

“Yes, it’s mine—no doubt about it,” he tremblingly muttered. “‘Perth to Edinburgh’”—the very ticket I stuck on it with my own hands in case of accidents. Let’s see if the key fits.”

He opened the portmanteau, and uttered a shout of joy as he once more sighted its glittering contents. Hastily turning them over, he satisfied himself that all was there but the roll of bank-notes and one gold watch, and, re-locking the portmanteau, lifted it in triumph and hurried out of the room. Just as he did so, Bell appeared on the landing from below, uttered a shout on seeing the robber stealing out of his bedroom, and instantly collared him.

“Hullo, you! what are you doing in my room, and running off with my—my—treasure?” he angrily demanded, trying hard to choke the bulky form, but astonished to find himself seized by the collar in turn.

“Oh, ho! then this is your portmanteau, is it?” cried M’Kinnon.

“Of course it is.”

“And the treasure that’s in it is yours too, perhaps?”

“Yes, everything in it is mine.”

“Where did you get it?”

This was rather a staggerer. Bell was about to say that he got it by a peculiar gold charm only known to himself; but then fearing he would be laughed at, he came back to the wonderfully commonplace statement—

“I got it—of course—I got it in the portmanteau.”

“I thought so,” hissed M’Kinnon, throttling him nearly senseless. “You are my prisoner.”

In a moment the idea that he was in the grasp of an escaped maniac flashed upon Bell; and with a terrific effort he wrenched himself free, dashed his fist in M’Kinnon’s face, and gave out a shout for the police that was audible away down in the street where M’Sweeny and myself were standing. But here Bell’s brief triumph came to an end. M’Kinnon was what is known as a fighting man; that is, one who, though not

a professional pugilist, glories in his muscular arms and big fists, and prided himself on the science and skill displayed in his boxing. He dropped the portmanteau, and instantly Bell felt as if a twenty-four pounder had been fired with unerring aim at his right eye. Then a flat paving-stone appeared to hit him on the back of the head; and he was just conscious of lying on his back, with a sledge hammer thudding at him all over the legs and body. Putting out his arms in a desperate grapple, he managed to seize and overturn the traveller; and then, wreathed together and pounding away like demons at each other's heads and noses and bodies, they rolled to the edge of the step, and down the entire flight of stairs to the front of the bar, where we picked them up and pulled them asunder. M'Kinnon was considerably scratched about the face, and bleeding profusely at the nose, with one of his eyes nearly closed; but as for Bell, he had no eyes at all—visible, and had to make his charge guided solely by the sound of the traveller's cursing and swearing.

"I charge that man with robbery and assault," he said, indicating the spot where M'Kinnon was being held out of harm's way. "He was coming out of my bedroom, bearing the portmanteau, which contains all the treasure I have in the world—gold and silver watches, brooches, and other valuables."

"Which were all stolen from me in the railway train—portmanteau and all," shrieked M'Kinnon, with another desperate effort to get at Bell. "Take him away, officer—take us both—portmanteau and all, and see who is the thief, before you let off either of us."

This last seemed the most reasonable and sensible proposal that could be made—more especially as the man produced a card of a Princes Street jeweller, to whom he said the whole of the "treasure" belonged. We marched them off accordingly, each loudly accusing the other as a robber and a villain every step of the way, and both so defiant and irascible, that, after a brief examination, we had to lock them in separate cells till the jeweller himself could be sent for. When this gentleman arrived, bringing with him the portmanteau with Bell's shirts, tools, and other belongings, the whole mystery was speedily explained; and as Bell by this time had gravely tendered an account of the success of his "gold charm," he looked terribly crestfallen and foolish when his property was restored to him, and the "treasure" returned to the rightful owner. As the two fighters made mutual admissions of carelessness in the mixing

of the portmanteaus in the train, and it was soon evident that there had been no intention to steal on either side, the prisoners were both dismissed, after leaving a deposit to insure their appearance next morning on a charge of creating a disturbance. The two adjourned to a hotel, where they blindly and blinkingly pledged each other's health till a late hour. Next morning they were each fined in five shillings, and dismissed with a caution, after which Bell vanished from the city, a sadder and a wiser man.

RAGAMUFFIN JOE.

I HAVE to notice "The Prince" again, as I indicated when giving his last conviction ; but have hitherto edged the matter off. The end of crime has always something disagreeable about it, and often the spectacle is best veiled from sight. At present, however, what I have to tell is connected with a case both interesting and peculiar. It may also add to the interest to hear the great lesson of crime coming unbidden from the lips of one of the cleverest of the fraternity. The words I give at the end are his own, and carry a weight with them that has often been of service to me when advising young criminals. "The Prince" here plays but a subordinate part, and the real hero of this sketch being Ragamuffin Joe, with him I am bound to begin.

Mr James Lorimer, commercial traveller, aged forty, and not overburdened with wealth, but blessed with a reflective mind and feeling heart, took his way listlessly down our High Street one afternoon when he had nothing else to do. He represented, in a feeble way, a firm in Sheffield, and had been only once in Edinburgh before ; but it can easily be guessed that, in a place so bristling with romance, he now found business and its calls gently receding, and pleasure and the quiet fascination of exploring our curious holes and corners standing decidedly to the front. He stopped before the Fountain Close, and peered into its dark depths. He wished to see it, but for a moment the repulsive aspect of this narrow cutting through the rotten houses held him back. It was only for a moment, however ; there was more force pressing him forward than holding him back ; so in he went. I do not know what took him into that particular close at that time. Some people would say it was mere chance ; but as the event became connected in a strange way both with his past and after history, I will give it a much higher name. The choice of names, however, is a mere matter of taste ; so, after hearing the story, the reader may give to the impelling force the name that pleases him best.

Mr Lorimer had got about half-way down the close, and was staring up at some of the looming old buildings, when some towsy ragamuffins crept out of their holes and gathered about him in some curiosity. By and by there was a tug at his pocket, and then he started round, to find two of the urchins fighting for his handkerchief.

Before he could recover from his surprise, one of the combatants—the dirtier of the two—knocked the other down, picked up the handkerchief, and politely handed it to its proper owner.

The boy's face, flushed with the struggle and lit by a half bashful smile, in spite of the dirt, was neither ugly nor repulsive; and Mr Lorimer, in thanking him, asked the valiant young detective his name.

"They call me Joe," was the hesitating answer; "but they generally put 'Ragamuffin' before it. That's 'cos I'm always ragged. You see I don't work for anything, and so they starve me, and beat me black and blue every night."

Mr Lorimer looked down on the old young face with strange interest. There was no whining, no complaining, no boasting; the boy seemed coolly to accept the state of affairs as his destiny.

"Have you no parent?" he asked.

"No—nor never had any. I'm a wuck'us brat, got cheap by a sham widder to work the begging dodge. That was in England somewhere. She took me all over, and then 'The Prince' got me after she was took up; but he's got five years too; so now I'm nobody's—except when they want to whop me, and then they all put in a hand."

"Do they hurt you?" asked the traveller, laying his hand kindly on the boy's shoulder, and drawing him away from the others.

"Hurt me? Yes. But I guess it don't matter much, for I sha'n't last much longer now. I'm pretty nigh a skellington already," which seemed true as anything he had spoken.

"Aren't you afraid to die?"

"No, not much. They couldn't whop me then."

"What do they whop you for?"

"'Cos I'm slow to learn. It goes agin my grain, I think; and I'm always tryin' to work the honest dodge. They want me to learn the pickpocket business; but they say I'll never make a good prig."

"What!" exclaimed his hearer, starting back in horror:

"do you mean to say that they really wish to train you to become a thief?"

"Course they do. They think it's the best trade out," was the cool rejoinder. "I don't. It might be if there was no perlice, and no jugs, and tread mills, and oakum to pick, and if nobody was ever hanged when they kill anybody. I see a man hanged once. He was a prig, but he killed his wife ; and I dreamt of him every night for nearly a year. I used to see him wi' my peepers shut just as well as open."

The boy shuddered now and paled, and it was evident that his imagination was both vivid and strong, and his heart, in spite of the terrible crushing and hardening, still in the right place. Mr Lorimer shuddered too, and looked down on the neglected wee morsel, with a tear in his eye and a bitter sigh for his own impoverished condition. Still the words welling up would come out—

"Would you not like to leave them, and grow up honest and useful?"

He was scarcely prepared for the joyful shout which rang from the boy's throat the instant the words were uttered, still less for the grasp of the two little dirty hands at his coat, and the eager brightness of the boy's eyes, as he breathlessly exclaimed—

"Oh, sir ! would you take me?"

The traveller's eyes fell.

"I wish—I wish—to heaven I could !" he almost groaned. "But I am poor, and—"

"Oh, never mind that, sir !" eagerly put in Joe. "I'll work for us both ; I will, indeed. I'm awful smart and quick when it's all square and straight, and no prigging wanted."

He would probably have said more, but at that moment the palm of a heavy hand came down with a ringing clout on his ear from behind, and nearly knocked him over on his side. A lumbering man, in a fur cap, corduroys, and heavy boots, was the assailant ; and he proceeded to follow up the attack by taking Joe by the rags, which, though surrounding his neck, could not be called a collar, and then kicking him till every bone in the boy's body must have ached with the brutal treatment.

Joe uttered no cry—not a tear was to be seen on his cheek ; but his piteous gaze was more than the traveller could stand. He, in turn, seized the ruffian and hurled his hulking frame not very gently aside, and then towered over him, looking for the moment much the stronger man of the two.

"Will you be good enough to say what you mean by that?" he breathlessly cried, pointing to the boy cowering in gratitude at his feet. "What do you kick him for? and who gave you authority to do it?"

"Nobody; it's my right. I'm his father, ye see," returned the ruffian, with a leer. "My name's Cobbs, and he is Joe Cobbs; so what can you make of it?"

"Nothing; only I believe your story to be false," was the indignant rejoinder.

"That don't hurt me. I see he's been tellin' ye some more of his lies. Never mind; it's a free country, and every one's welcome to their own opinion. Come on, you, or I'll break every bone in your body;" and, with a ferocious scowl and a shake of his massive fist in the boy's face, he stalked back into his den, followed by Joe like a cowering hound.

Mr Lorimer turned away with a sigh, and got out of the close as quickly as possible. He wandered slowly down the Canongate, occasionally stopping and sometimes exploring, but quite unable to shake off the recollection of little Ragamuffin Joe. He had reached the foot of the long street, and was reading an ancient inscription on one of the houses, when a light touch on the arm made him look round. Then he started in earnest, for there in front of him, with a joyful light beaming from his bright eyes, stood Ragamuffin Joe. There were traces of tears about his eyes; but the bright smile of recognition, and his undisguised joy at recovering his new friend, only made them shine on his dirty cheeks like so many diamonds. Mr Lorimer knew what that look meant, and a pang of self-reproach shot through his heart.

"Well, Joe, what is it now?" he hesitatingly inquired.

"Got out by the winder, sir, and I've run away," was the reply. "I've come to be took away by you and made something of."

"I'm sorry, Joe; but I'm afraid it would never do," replied the traveller. "You're rather dirty, and—"

"Dirty? Oh, I'll soon mend that. Stand there a minute and see," cried Joe, with alacrity, bounding over to the well in the middle of the street and pumping it with all his might on his scrap of a cap, and then with this polishing and scrubbing at his face and matted hair till they both shone again. "See, I'm pretty clean now, sir, and I'm awful willin' to learn."

Mr Lorimer saw that, and that the boy's face was a good one; but he saw more. He saw that the face bore a resem-

blance to one he had known and loved years before ; and his puzzled stare brought back a rush of sweet memories that almost blinded him to the boy's presence. Joe looked concerned.

"What's wrong?" he dubiously inquired. "Ain't it quite clean?"

"Oh, yes! only you're very like a lady I knew long ago. "Don't you know your real name?"

"No. Nothing but Joe, with the other word before it," was the terse reply. "It's writ in the wuck'us' book, I daresay ; but then who's to know where they are? P'r'aps 'The Prince' might know ; but he won't be out for two years. Ye see, my mother died afore I was put in, and I never had no father. 'The Prince' would tell the place if he knows it, for he's not a bad sort. He used to chaff me, and torment me, but he never beat me, and he al'ays gave me plenty of peck. I like 'The Prince,' but then he's a prig too ; so I'd rather go wi' you."

"I wish you could," fervently returned the traveller ; "but just now you're too ragged. And, besides, even if I could take you, it would need to be done in a business-like way, so that no one could come after you and annoy me. I will think the matter over, and perhaps find you out to-morrow and let you know. Good-bye."

Joe said 'Good-bye' in a mechanical way, but stood like a statue in the middle of the street, looking after the friend that he never expected to see more, with the tears standing thick in his eyes. Mr Lorimer felt that he was being followed by a pair of wistful eyes, and did not dare to trust himself to look round. His heart was prompting him urgently to one course, while his reason was as determinedly tugging him back from incurring the responsibility ; and he knew that a mere feather's weight would give the heart the victory. Sad and depressed, he wandered through the Queen's Park, and then got back to the Temperance Hotel in the High Street where he had put up.

But before entering the hotel another surprise awaited him. A touch on the arm as before made him look round, and there once more stood the irrepressible Joe! His upper coating of rags had been exchanged for a second-hand jacket, a world too large for him, and shabby with age, but still whole and tidy. His trousers were the same as before, but carefully pinned up here and there at the rents ; and his feet and hands had been washed as clean as water could make them.

Mr Lorimer stared at the eager eyes, and bright expectant face, till the tears came into his own eyes, and then, try as he liked, he could not get out one word.

"I've come again, sir, to see if you'll take me now," said the poor neglected morsel. "I went to old Barney, in the Cowgate, and told him I was to be took away and made something of by a gentleman, only I was too ragged. Barney's a good sort, only he don't know me, and wasn't sure about helpin' me. I was that eager about getting some togs on tick, that when I told him I'd pay him back every penny and more as soon as I'd worked for it on the straight line, I began bubbling. I couldn't help it. Barney was bubbling too—a little, you know. I see it in his eyes; and then he got out this jacket for me. It's a topper. Oh, sir! you might take me now! I'm only a poor boy that's got nobody to care for him or look after him; but I'd do such a lot for you. Oh, do take me; and when you're old and weak you'll be glad, 'cos then I'll be strong and big, and I'll work for you."

Mr Lorimer turned away and looked hard up the street, and Joe interpreted the gesture in his own way; and his despairing grasp at the other's arm got tighter, and his entreaties more vehement.

"Oh, sir!" he pleaded, "I'm not so very bad. I never tell lies—they'll tell you so; and I can read a little when it's in print; and I know you wouldn't whop me, and I'm awful quick and willin' with people that don't whop me. You might just take me, and if I turn out bad, hand me over to the perlice, or send me back to Slatey Cobbs, to be whopped for running away."

Mr Lorimer turned round and smiled through his tears, with a light in his eyes that sent a thrill of hope through Joe's heart.

"Well, Joe, I'll try it; I'll take you," he said. "I'm poor, like yourself, though I wear a black coat and don't go in rags; but I daresay we'll manage to get a crust between us."

"A crust!" cried Joe, with a whoop and a shout, tossing his cap up in the air nearly as high as the second storey—"a crust! why, we'll get whole lots of crust. I'll work for 'em. Shall I run up-stairs now and clean your boots, sir, or lift your luggage, or carry a lot of coals, or something?" and Joe looked like a trained runner eagerly awaiting the signal to start. "I'm terribly strong, especially when I get peck sort o' regular; but just now I don't need none, and I'm so glad that I could do without it for a month."

"No, no, Joe, there's nothing wanted just now," was the smiling reply. "Though I may find you plenty to do by and by; that is, if you can walk a deal and not get tired."

"Tired!" echoed Joe, as if it were the most preposterous idea in the world. "I'll never get tired alongside o' you. I'll walk all round the world with you. Oh! that's an awful short walk. I'll walk twice round, and never feel tired then;" and his beaming eyes spoke the most undoubting sincerity.

"In that case you had better come with me a short walk just now," was the rejoinder; and Mr Lorimer led him down the High Street to a cheap clothing establishment, where a jacket, waistcoat, trowsers, and underclothing, with boots and cap complete, were purchased and wrapped up before Joe's wondering and delightful eyes. Carrying this parcel of treasure with due reverence under his arm, Joe was next escorted to the Public Baths in Nicolson Square, where he thoroughly scrubbed himself from head to toe. Then he donned his new clothes, with many a delightful jump and uncontrollable double-shuffle, and was taken to a barber's, where his towsey hair was at last reduced to something like proportion by the use of scissors and oil. The bundle of rags he had worn seemed to cost him some thinking, for as he left the barber's he turned to his benefactor with some hesitation.

"Shall I need them togs again, sir, do you think?" he asked.

"I hope not."

"Then, might I give 'em back to old Barney? He can sell them, and I won't take a minute to run down."

It is the floating straws that show how the stream runs, and I daresay this trifling act of gratitude to the old clothesman displayed by this future man of business made more impression on Mr Lorimer than all Joe's other actions put together. At anyrate, he accompanied him to the dingy shop, and witnessed the old man's surprise, and offered him a shilling for his trouble, but only found that there were others as well as himself in the world who could do a good action without looking for payment. Mr Lorimer's purse, not very full at starting, was now pretty empty; but his heart was full instead, and we all know that that makes up for it. Joe's strange resemblance to the only woman he had ever loved—which seemed to increase rather than diminish—perhaps had a good deal to do with it; but if that began it, a good many other things were combined to carry it on.

Mr Lorimer slept soundly that night, and for a good many nights after it, while Joe's sharpness and ready wit, his impulsive generosity, and his unquenchable eagerness "to be made something of," drew them closer and closer every day. Joe carried his samples from shop to shop, packed and unpacked them with nimble fingers, ran errands in the different towns they visited, posted letters, and even ferreted out likely shops in localities that the rather retiring Mr Lorimer would never have thought of. Thus it came that Ragamuffin Joe, far from being a drag upon him, was from the first day a positive acquisition. Most unaccountably, business and orders increased; other firms, including notably a Birmingham jeweller, begged the "energetic and pushing Mr Lorimer" to represent them in his various rounds; the unpretentious little parcels swelled to great leather trunks, which required a porter and a hurley to move them from one place to another, and took Joe all his time and strength to unpack; and in this prosperous way two years rolled away. The end of that time saw Joe a great deal improved, and now brings me to my part of the story, as, in the natural course of things, they had once more turned up in Edinburgh. One result of the advice and companionship of the economical and far-seeing Joe was, that Mr Lorimer, instead of putting up with the hurry and discomfort of cheap hotels in large towns, where they generally stayed a week or two, simply took a comfortable lodging. They were now located in Lothian Street, in the house of a quiet widow; and that brings me directly to the incident.

Joe happened to be coming up the Bridge alone one day at a smart pace, when he noticed his friend and patron, Mr Lorimer, further forward on the other side, walking equally fast. There was nothing extraordinary in the circumstance; they often separated in the course of the day, and found it advantageous to do so; but it so happened that this time Joe caught sight of a man behind his friend, and evidently following him, whose evil-like face made him start as he recognised it. It was Slaty Cobbs, the cracksman, who had so kindly undertaken Joe's education and support when "The Prince" was unexpectedly called elsewhere. But why was he following the unconscious traveller?—that was the question that came to Joe with the first start and flush. Could it be anything connected with Joe himself, or was it simply in the way of business, and with the one object—plunder? Joe couldn't say; but he dodged along thoroughly roused, and watching the pair

very much as a cat watches a mouse. Mr Lorimer made straight for his lodging, Slatey Cobbs steadily following; and then came a curious thing. As soon as the traveller disappeared, the cracksman crossed the street, looked up at the window of the flat in which the traveller lodged, made some peculiar signs with his fingers, which Joe translated as fast as they were made, received some signals in return, and then walked off and disappeared.

"A plant!" muttered Joe, in great excitement, as he got out from his hiding-place round the corner of the Potterrow. "Oh! how thankful I am that I saw him! But who's the other? I must find out that first thing. They've arranged this thing very nicely, and a precious good haul they'd get; but they don't seem to know that I'm in the concern. Ah, ha, ha! I think I see their faces when they find themselves circumvented! I'll watch the whole thing myself, and not say a word to Mr Lorimer; he's so gentle and nervous that it would quite upset him. But I'm made of harder stuff; so here goes."

He ran up the stair, went softly and unconcernedly into the sitting-room, where he found Mr Lorimer quietly smoking and reading the papers, then flitted over the whole room, minutely examining everything. He missed only one article—a valuable clasp knife, with a spring back, belonging to himself, which he distinctly remembered leaving on the mantelpiece in the morning. Beyond a simple inquiry at Mr Lorimer, he said nothing, but went straight to the kitchen, with no better success. The landlady had neither seen nor heard of the knife, nor as much as entered their room during their absence.

"I believe it," was Joe's comment, with this mental addition, "but some one else has."

Presently he led the talk in another direction.

"What other lodgers have you got—I mean with windows looking to the front?" he asked.

"Oh! there's nobody but the student, Mr Smith," was the simple reply. "And as for him stealing your knife, it's quite out of the question. Why, what are you staring at?"

"Nothing—nothing," cautiously replied Joe. "I was only thinking of an old friend of mine—a princely friend—who used sometimes to call himself Smith by way of a joke, you know. What is this student like?"

"Oh! quite a gentleman—and so handsome! and yet he comes into the kitchen here just as frankly as if he were a

common man. The only fault I have to him is, that he smokes so much—it spoils the carpets.”

“Always cigars, too, I suppose?” inquiringly added Joe.

“Always; and then he’s continually reading them horrid sporting papers—”

“Just like the Smith that I used to know,” chorused Joe. “Been long here?”

“Oh, no! only two nights.”

“Any luggage?”

“Yes, lots; only it hasn’t come yet. It’s the railway that’s to blame; but I’m quite safe, for he paid me the week in advance.”

“Oh, yes! *you* are quite safe,” emphatically returned Joe; and then the subject was dropped.

Joe left the kitchen, and spent nearly an hour in the little bedroom used for storing their samples. He turned out every trunk, and enumerated every separate article, and thus convinced himself that no one had been *inside* the room during his absence. Chance, or his own sharpened wits, then led him to examine the lock outside. A scrap of red putty sticking to the works, with some scratches and indentations here and there, made him whistle out expressively, and took him back to the kitchen in double-quick time. But even now, in his excitement, his native caution did not desert him.

“I sha’n’t sleep on the sofa to-night,” he said, decidedly, addressing the landlady; “I’ll sleep in the closet, if you can make up a bed.”

“What! among the leather trunks?” exclaimed the widow, in surprise.

“Yes, just that,” was the cool rejoinder. “You needn’t put up a bedstead either; I’ll sleep on top of the trunks.”

“You’re a funny laddie,” was the widow’s comment, as she agreed to the eccentric arrangement.

“And I’m going to bring up a friend—a man—to sleep here all night,” was the next astonisher. “Can you put him up anywhere?”

“Well, there’s the bedroom next to Mr Smith’s, if that would do.”

“Beautiful!—the very thing. You get it ready, while I go and tell him you can put him up;” and without another word of explanation, the “funny laddie” took his cap and walked out.

He did not trifle, but got down by the back of the College

and the Horse Wynd, and up to the Central Office, where he inquired for me. I stared at the trim lad standing before me, and looking so fresh and happy and knowing, but the recognition did not come.

"I should know your face," I said, with a smile, "but I don't."

"You don't!" he echoed, slapping his thigh in ecstasy. "Well, that's good! They used to call me Ragamuffin Joe."

"What!—Joe! is it you?" I exclaimed, taking his proffered hand and shaking it warmly.

"It's me, and nobody else," he said, "and I want you to help me. Not that I am in any trouble, you know. I'm all right now; nobody whops me, and I can read and write and cipher, and I've got the matter of thirty pounds in the bank—all my own—besides. But here's what I come about. "The Prince" and Slaty Cobbs are up to their old games, and I've got you a lodging for the night, which I hope you will accept;" and then he explained all he knew and anticipated.

I did not know well which to rejoice most over—Joe's sharpness, or the thought of fairly capturing Slaty Cobbs. As for "The Prince"—reluctantly, I must confess it—I was really sorry that he was involved, and could I have saved him, even at the expense of some trouble, I believe I should have done so. As soon as it was dark, I joined Joe at the lodgings, according to our plan, took up my quarters, and quietly waited for "the tip."

"Mr Smith" came in late, bringing with him rather a coarse-looking friend, whom he shortly after announced his intention of detaining over night. They sat drinking and playing cards till near twelve, while I sat and listened in vain at the partition for snatches of their talk; then all sound ceased, and the whole place seemed wrapped in slumber. I fell asleep myself at last, but had not slept long when I was roused by a terrific uproar from the direction of Joe's sleeping place. I was on the spot in a moment, and took in the position at a glance. The two burglars had got the door open by some means, and were struggling hard to overpower the brave lad, who had purposely allowed them to get thus far before uttering a cry. I got Slaty Cobbs down with one sweeping blow on the head with the truncheon, but "The Prince" was more troublesome. He had a knife—the same Joe had missed—in his hand, and he did not seem to notice me, as he made a furious stab at the boy in his clutches. But Joe was quick, and strong too. He

caught the murderous hand by the wrist, and swung it right round with a dexterous twist, which dislocated the joint, and drew from "The Prince" a dreadful yell of agony. I heard the yell, and saw him drop, but did not suspect the whole truth till a light was brought, and the blood streaming from his neck and breast was revealed. The point of the sharp knife had caught his own throat and slashed it deeply, and from the wound thus accidentally given the blood was bubbling in a way that made me fear that one of the arteries had been touched. He was white and senseless; but we bound up the wound in a rough way and hurried him off to the Infirmary, while Cobbs was taken off to the Office and locked up.

But "The Prince" never rallied. He lived for about a fortnight, during which time Joe visited him regularly every day, taking him in little delicacies which were never eaten, and tending him more unremittingly while there than the kindest of nurses. "The Prince," after the first start of recognition and explanation, readily gave Joe all the information in his possession regarding the place of his birth and the locality of the workhouse from which he had been taken; but he got weaker every day, and at last could only speak with the greatest difficulty. I saw him about a week before his death. He looked at me, smiled, and feebly took my hand. As I bent down over him I heard him whisper something, and it was the last I ever heard him speak. These were the words—

"Ah! I wish that any one thinking of taking to priggish and trickery could see me now."

I offer no comment. The words are *verbatim*, and speak for themselves.

Joe paid the expenses of "The Prince's" funeral out of his own pocket; and shortly after, while Slatey Cobbs went away to serve his five years, Joe and Mr Lorimer returned to England, where they succeeded in establishing the fact that Joe was the only child of a lady whom Mr Lorimer had loved in his youth, but who had afterwards been not very happily married to another, who had died before Joe was born. Now, the reader may expect that this surprising discovery brought Joe into a fortune; but I must stick to the truth, and at once dispel the illusion. But if it did not bring him fortune, it brought him something; and as that something has to do with a very interesting circumstance, it shall finish my story.

Joe found that he owned, by the death of his grandfather, a little property—a cottage, I think—which, if sold, would have

brought about two hundred pounds. I say "if sold" advisedly, for, to tell the truth, it was sold, and for a queer purpose.

Mr Lorimer met with a severe accident in trying to enter a railway carriage while the train was in motion. He was long ill, for the nervous system had received a great shock ; and in that illness not only all his savings, but Joe's as well, were swallowed up. To make matters worse, an action against the railway company only ended in a defeat, and they had the expenses of both sides to pay. Mr Lorimer sank under the blow, in spite of everything that Joe could say, and I daresay would have gone quietly to the grave, had his inseparable companion been less energetic and determined. Joe went to the highest medical professor that could be procured for love or money, and brought him in his carriage to see Mr Lorimer. The great man looked at his patient, asked him a few questions, and then very decidedly ordered him off to the south of France as the only thing likely to save his life. Mr Lorimer smiled and sighed, but Joe did neither. He went straight to a lawyer with the title-deeds of the little property which had just come into his possession, and told him to sell it to the highest bidder. This was done, and with two hundred and twenty-five pounds in his possession, and all his arrangements completed, he returned to his friend. Mr Lorimer stared and choked ; but when the money was pressed bodily into his hand, with the determined injunction to "go and get well as soon as he liked," he covered his face with his hands, burst into tears, and sobbed like a child.

Mr Lorimer was gone for nearly nine months, and he did not die, for Joe worked for him during his absence, and then, when he was quite well, went for him and brought him back in triumph. They are both alive now, as you may guess, for the firm of "Lorimer & Son" is one of the largest in Birmingham. Mr Lorimer is still a bachelor ; but need I say that the "Son" is he who was once called "RAGAMUFFIN JOE?"

TRACKING A CHILD-STEALER.

I HAVE often wondered that a detective's work should so often be rewarded by the recovery of the lost property ; but so it generally happens—the criminal either giving himself up for lost, or no difficulty being raised as to the identity of the stolen articles. Exceptions I have met with, and I am now about to give one both curious and interesting ; but they were only exceptions. Supposing a gold wedding-ring were stolen, and the thief taken with it on her finger, even though it were most positively sworn to as the stolen property, wedding-rings are so much alike, that a little hard swearing and brazen impudence on the part of the thief might end in an acquittal. One would think so, at least. But ten to one it would not turn out so, for at this juncture the brazen impudence and hard swearing would be the very thing that would be wanting. I don't attempt to account for it—I merely give it as a fact. There seems to be a something about the law and the police and their surroundings before which guilt quails and shrinks instinctively.

That, I say, is the rule. Here is an exception. One afternoon, just as I got back to the Office after dinner, M'Sweeny came out of one of the side rooms looking considerably agitated.

"I'm glad you've come," he said, unmistakably tear-wet about the eyes. "Go in there, for I can't stand it any longer. The poor cratur's words 'ud draw tears from a heart of stone, they would. A child has been stolen from St Mary's Wynd ; the mother and father are in there—and—and—"

He choked and mumbled over the rest, but poked his hand towards an open door, and, at once roused, I walked into the room and found the couple mentioned—the woman crying hysterically, with her eyes all red and swollen, and the man looking deadly white with grief and concern. They both looked under thirty, and plain, hard-working people ; but there was something about their awful anguish and distress that won

my sympathy at once. The man rose at my entrance with an eager look of enquiry.

"You are Mr McGovan?"

"Yes. This is a sad affair. When did it happen?"

"About two hours ago," broke in the woman, springing up at the mention of my name, and clasping her hands in a pitying and imploring look. "Oh, sir! you will get it back for us? They say you are clever. You will not let us be robbed of the poor wee darling? Only say—say that you will get it, and I will bless you for the words. It is the only one that has been spared to us—the only one out of four—and I cannot live without it. Oh! if I only had it in my arms now, I could give up every penny we have—everything we have in the shop—every stick and rag we have—and travel through the world begging from door to door with a light heart. One wee smile—one bright look of his eyes—would pay for all;" and a burst of sobbing drowned the rest.

"Of course he'll get it, Nelly darling," interposed the man, with trembling apprehension, evidently divided between his own fears and his desire to console his wife. "The police are very quick and sharp now-a-days, aren't they, sir? You'll not be long of hearing about it."

My answer did not come readily—not from any reluctance to throw out hope and soothe the poor woman, but because a very similar case had come in our way not six months before, and I am bound to say, though the child had been eventually recovered, we had not been able to make any great display of cleverness or acuteness in the matter. Not from lack of these qualities either; but chance or circumstances were against us. The man's anxiety quickened at my hesitation.

"Surely a child-stealer could never escape?" he said, with the tears streaming into his eyes. "You seem to hesitate. Just speak out what you think. Never mind me."

"Nor me either—I am quite firm," ejaculated the woman, shaking from head to foot. "I can bear anything—but to lose it."

Had the case been less grave and distressing, I might have smiled at the rapidity with which their questions followed each other. As it was, I tried my best to answer them.

"The police are as sharp and quick—sharper, I may say, than ever they were; but a case like this lies a little out of the beaten track, and so is apt to puzzle us. That is why I hesitated—not because I am either reluctant or unwilling to engage in it. In ordinary cases of theft we can say almost to a

certainly whether the property will be recovered ; but with child-stealing it is different. In the last case we had the apparent want of a motive for the crime, and this mystified us, and tied our hands ; and it may be so in this too. Just tell me, as briefly as you can, how the thing happened."

The woman began to do so ; but she very soon broke down, and her husband had to take it up and finish it. From his story it appeared that Mrs O'Neil, his wife, being busy in the shop, and the day being a fine one, she allowed a girl in her employ to take the child—a fine boy of eight months—out for a walk ; that the girl had carried him as far as Princes Street Gardens, and had got back again to the High Street, when she was accosted by a woman in a tawdry shawl and bonnet, and invited into a dark close "to speak for a moment." Suspecting nothing, she followed the woman, and was then induced to go some fool's errand, the woman meanwhile "taking care" of the child. When she got back, both woman and child were gone ; and after wasting a good deal of precious time in running about screaming and crying with terror, she at last told a policeman, and then went home to inform her mistress. The mother, in turn, spent a good hour about closes and wynds, looking for the strange woman in vain, and bewailing her loss ; but at last she found courage to return and inform her husband, who at once brought them up to the Central Office to see what we could do for them.

Thus far the case was much the same as one that had already bothered us. But experience is a grand teacher ; even one precedent had not been unprofitable to me, and I now settled myself to sift this matter to the bottom.

"I wish you had brought this girl up with you," I said ; "I would like to question her myself. Was there no peculiarity about the woman, does she say, by which she could recognise her again?"

"None ; we asked her repeatedly. But even the little we have got out of her may be all wrong, for she only saw the woman for a moment, and took little notice of her ; and fear seems to have driven that little out of her head."

"Where's the girl now?"

"Looking after the shop."

"I will see her by and by. Now, don't think me inquisitive or prying, but just answer my questions as if I were some tried and trusty friend. You are not particularly well off—I mean not rich?"

"Oh no, sir!—far from it. We've sometimes a hard pull to make both ends meet. Not but we turn over a good deal of stuff in a week; but in such a locality everything has to be sold so cheap—some things at cost price—that I often find myself at the end of the week with less than a working man's wage."

"I thought as much. Then the thief or her agents have little to expect in the shape of ransom money, bribes for tidings, and so forth?"

"Very little, unless we were to offer a reward. I would sell everything for that, if you think it would do any good."

"It might; and we will see about that, and probably add something to it. But try to think. Is there no one you can remember to have injured in any way, who might have retaliated thus out of revenge or spite? ~~That~~ This was the incentive, I believe, with gipsy child-stealers long ago, and human nature is much the same now-a-days. It seems to me that such an act could not have been done at a moment's prompting, seeing that the culprit has got off without leaving a trace behind, but must have been systematically planned; and to do that there must have been a motive."

"I can safely say that I do not remember injuring any one," replied the man, opening his eyes a little, as if the turn of thought were new to him. "I don't think any one could harbour spite against us, or knowingly inflict on us such a cruel injury."

"Do not decide hurriedly; a mere hint may put us on the right track," I calmly persisted. "Let your mind run back a few years among your various acquaintances, and see if you cannot spot out some one *likely* to be the criminal. A very trifling act might do it: a word or taunt heedlessly dropped might rankle for years in some one's breast till it ended in this cruel revenge;" and having great faith in the quickness of women's perceptions, I turned to his wife—"Can you not think of any one?"

"No one—unless—no, it couldn't be Meg Malone?" and she turned inquiringly to her husband.

"Ah! let's hear about Meg," I quickly put in. "Who is she? and why did you think of her?"

"But I don't think it could be her," slowly and thoughtfully continued Mrs O'Neil, so suddenly interested that the tears began for the moment to dry on her cheeks. "Besides, it's years since I have seen her."

"Did you ever quarrel?"

"Oh, yes! and a very bitter quarrel it was. She killed my

mother by her carelessness—at least, I laid the death at her door; and when I got home and saw my mother stretched out dead, and the whole house full of misery and desolation, in a moment I lost all control of myself. I was in service then, and young and very passionate. I turned round on Meg, and, catching up one of the tumblers off the dresser, I first wished that heaven might blight her with barrenness and never make a mother of her, and then I hurled the glass at her face. I didn't mean to strike her, but thought she would make a quick dive and avoid it. But she seemed stupefied by the curse I had called down on her, and only stared at me without moving. The tumbler caught her on the forehead, and made a great round gash, which haunted me for weeks after in my horrible fever-dreams."

The scene must have been an exciting one, for the narrator shivered and paled at the recollection. After a pause she continued—

"I think the passion got the better of me then, and I fainted clean away. I knew nothing that was happening around me for weeks after; and when I did come round, they said I had been ill. The first time I saw Meg I asked her to forgive me. She didn't show any passion, but said, quite calmly, that she would forgive me—when I was rotting in my grave beside my mother. I saw that we could be friends no more, and secretly I was not sorry. Well, sir, strangely enough, she got married, and from that day to this, so far as I know, she has been as barren as the fig-tree."

This last speech was said with a kind of triumphant gleam, which I understood perfectly. Like many of her sex, the woman before me was inclined to be superstitious, and so thought that her curse had taken effect, as a just punishment for a great wrong. From this I made a curious deduction. If she thought so, how much more would the woman cursed be inclined to religiously believe it? I brightened a little. I thought I was getting at a clue.

"You say you have not seen her for years. What became of her?"

"Well, she travelled the country hawking cheap jewellery till her husband died, and after that I lost sight of her. I rather think she is about Glasgow somewhere now."

"Did the cut from the tumbler leave a mark on her brow—a scar of any kind?"

"Yes, a half-circle above the right eye, as white as my hand

—except when she's in a passion : then it turns bluish. She never showed passion the same as other folks, and that's the only way you could tell."

I scarcely heard these words ; indeed, I rather think she said more, which I have forgotten. I was thinking of something else. Little as I knew of Glasgow and its criminals, I had seen and heard of a certain Meg—a travelling tout for one of the worst gangs in the Havannah, and she too had a scar on her brow ; but then the other name was different ; and, after thinking a while, I turned to Mrs O'Neil for more information.

"You said that her name is Malone, I think? Did you ever hear her get any other?"

"That was her maiden name. Her married name was—was—"

Mrs O'Neil puzzled and flustered herself red in the face in the vain effort to remember.

"I can't think how I have forgotten it," she said, evidently angry with herself. "It was a queer sort of a name too ; only I always spoke of her by the old name."

"Was it Maddox?"

"The very name. How did you guess it? Do you know her?"

"Not very well."

This was true. I knew her to be the paid servant of a gang of thieves ; but though she was well known in certain quarters, she had only once come in my way ; that had been years before, and, curiously enough, in connection with a false entry of birth, for which she was prosecuted and sentenced to a year's imprisonment. These facts, however, I kept to myself ; and after a few more questions, I dismissed the O'Neils, saying—

"I think we can do something for you. But send up the girl at once. I may get something out of her that may be useful. If we don't accomplish anything in a day or two, we will arrange about offering a reward."

Vague and unpromising as I tried to make my words, they appeared to thrill the woman right through. A wild look of ecstasy and joy came into her eyes. She first whitened and then flushed to the roots of the hair, and then she impulsively seized both my hands in her own and kissed them repeatedly, with the hot tears dropping on them in a fresh rush from her eyes. Her husband appeared no less moved. He took my

hands and pressed them warmly ; but I believe if he had obeyed the impulse of the moment, he could have hugged me with joy. Their emotion became catching. We spoke words, too, though what they were I have not the faintest recollection ; but they were gone at last, leaving me determined to work, if ever in my life I had worked. The girl was sent up shortly after, but she looked so scared that I saw at once that she would require very careful handling. I first quietly and pleasantly talked her out of the idea that she was in the Police Office, and then gradually sidled round to the subject on my mind.

“ I suppose, now, Jessie, you don’t remember what the woman’s face was like—whether it was fair or dark ? ”

“ I dinna ken ; but, yes—I think it was gey dark. I think I wad ken the face again if I was to see it. ”

“ Was it dark *all over* ? ” I pursued, as indifferently as possible.

“ Yes—a’ but a white mark on her broo. I forgot aboot that till the now. ”

“ Which side of her brow ? ”

“ That side ; ” and she pointed to my right eyebrow.

“ What was the mark like, Jessie, do you mind ? ”

“ It was like the mark o’ a cut or burn or something—it was roond—like that ; ” and she described a half-circle on the palm of her hand with her finger.

I lifted the tumbler off a water carafe at my elbow, and pressed the half of it hard on my own palm. It left an indentation, momentarily white, which I held up before the girl’s eyes.

“ Was it something like that, Jessie ? ”

She smiled out into the first look of bright intelligence I had seen cross her face, and eagerly clasped her hands as she cried—

“ Oh, it was jist like that, sir ! ”

Meg Maddox, the thieves’ tout, sure enough ! I thought I would have pretty plain sailing now ; so, after a few more questions, I dismissed the girl—with one caution, however.

“ You need not say anything to your mistress about the mark on the woman’s brow, Jessie. I’m afraid it would make her ill ; so we had better keep that to ourselves—do you see ? You wouldn’t like to make her ill, would you ? ”

“ Oh, no ! she’s sae guid to me, ” impulsively returned the girl, with tears in her eyes. “ I’m awfu’ vexed that I was sae stupit as to let the wee thing oot o’ my airms. I thocht they

wad hang me or something for't ; but they never said anything, an' that made me vexter. I'll no say cnything about the mark."

"That's right—that's a good girl. But you may tell them I was very well pleased with your answers."

She got as far as the door, and then, with her little heart full, she turned and hesitatingly said—

"May I tell them that ye gied me a shullin'?"

The odd question took me aback a little, but I got out some sort of an answer ; and then, when she was gone, I at once set to work. My first business was to telegraph to the chief of the detective staff in Glasgow. This was the message :—

"Have you seen or heard of Meg Maddox, the travelling tout of Ben Mason's gang, in the Havannah, lately? Is she in town now? If not, do you know when she left it?"

The answer came in a little over thirty minutes, and ran thus—

"Meg Maddox left Glasgow for Edinburgh yesterday afternoon by the 4.45 train from Buchanan Street Station. Has not been seen since."

This was just the information I wanted. I got out of the Office, and the grass did not grow under my feet on the way to the Caledonian Station in Lothian Road. The Third-Class Ticket Office was shut, but I easily got behind and tackled the clerk.

"How long have you been here?"

"All forenoon."

"A train started for Glasgow about an hour ago ; did any of 'our bairns' go with it?"

"Our bairns," of course, meant thieves, and he understood me perfectly ; but he pondered and was slow to answer.

"Was it a man or a woman?"

"A woman. I think she would go third-class."

"Had she a child—a noisy girning brat—with her?"

"Yes," I said, at a hazard.

"A dirty bundle, a hand-basket—and a round white scar over her brow?"

"Yes ; did she go with the train?"

"She did. I saw her get into it. She had been very impatient, for it was fifteen minutes late, and came and asked me more than once if I was sure it wasn't away."

"That'll do. When can I get a train?"

"To Glasgow?"

"Yes. Of course hers was for there?"

"Yes—oh! in about forty-five minutes. Too long? Well, I could shove you along now as far as Carstairs, and there you might stop some train from the south. Will that do?"

"For want of a better, thank you. Come on then."

I followed him out of the booking-office, spoke to the manager, and was soon birling along, without pause or hindrance, towards Carstairs Junction. There, as a favour, I was allowed to get on a goods engine—there was no passenger train—beside the driver, and very soon was run in at the goods siding at Buchanan Street. I got over the broad network of shunting rails as fast as possible, and was hurrying out of the station, when I was suddenly grasped by the arm and held fast.

A Glasgow detective, whom I knew well, was smiling into my face.

"You're in a hurry," he said. "Is it Meg you're after?"

"Yes. How long have you been here?"

"Ever since your telegram came inquiring about her. There's somebody at every station waiting for her."

"Waiting for her?" I echoed, almost in a shout. "You don't mean to say that you haven't seen her? Didn't an Edinburgh train come in a while ago?"

"Yes, but she didn't come with it."

"She did come with it—I know she came with it!" I cried, almost stamping the boots off my feet in a fever of mortification. "Where were your eyes, man?"

"In my head, where they are now. I tell you I was watching for her, and she did not get out here. She may have got in at the other end, of course—that's quite a different matter."

The man before me was clever, sharp, and intelligent—the pick of the Glasgow staff, and I knew it; so I could only apologise for my hastiness. But still the mystery remained: how had the jade given us the slip? She had taken out a ticket for Glasgow, and could have no suspicion that I was after her. Could anything, then, have induced her to get out at an intermediate station? I thought not, but as at first no other feasible idea presented itself, I resigned myself to the task of returning by the Parliamentary train, and inquiring at every station on the way.

I had just scribbled a message to the Superintendent, telling

them to scour the city for her if she did not turn up at any of the stations, and detain her and the child if they found her, when a new idea struck me, and stopped me from going round to the other side of the station.

"Were you standing here when the train came in?" I asked of my companion—"I mean, out in such a position that she might have seen you from the carriage window?"

"Not exactly; I stood in the parcel-office there. Still, I didn't think of that; she might have caught a glimpse of me through those great windows. In that case she might have feared something, and instead of coming out, gone back to some of the other stations."

"Just what I suspect; and the want of a ticket might cause her to be noticed particularly. There is one of the starters—one of the 'show-your-ticket' gentlemen; perhaps he can set us right. Here, lad; didn't you run over the third-class carriages of the last train that went out before it started?"

The man stared at the odd question, not sure, perhaps, but some reprimand was in store for him, but at last slowly got out—

"Yes—I did."

"Had they all tickets?"

"Yes, all;—no, there was one hadn't—a poor woman with a child, who had run a long way, and was afraid to get out lest the train should leave her after all. She offered the money—"

"Where to?"

"Edinburgh."

"Ah! go on."

"We're not allowed to do anything like that, and I was going to take her out, when a gentleman volunteered to run to the booking-office for a ticket for her. He got back, and in, just as the train was beginning to move."

"Ah! I saw him," interposed my companion with a nod. "Had the woman anything peculiar about her face?"

"Nothing. She was darkish complexioned, and—yes—I rather think she had a scar—a white roundish scar—above her eyebrow."

So far, so good! She had only played us the common trick of "doubling on the trail," and would now probably consider herself safe, right under our nose—just as I have known a thief to coolly walk in among the audience at a police court, and remain there while we fruitlessly hunted the whole city for him. If she had really gone as far as Edinburgh—and I

would make sure of that by inquiring at every station—and escaped M'Sweeny at the station, I knew a certain house in St James' Street, where I was pretty sure either to clap hands on her, or hear of her whereabouts.

I telegraphed to every station, so that they might have their answers ready for me when I passed, and then did some impatient stamping about the platform for the remaining half-hour. Of course, I expected no answer, but nevertheless one came—from Slateford, a little station about two miles from Edinburgh. The "flimsy" was shoved into my hand just as I was getting into the train, and read thus:—

"The woman with the child you describe got out at this station—Slateford,—though her ticket was for Edinburgh."

I whistled out at the news.

"Ha! she does fear something, then; and M'Sweeny will tramp the station at Lothian Road in vain. She prefers a walk of two miles to risking a meeting. Well, I must send him out the Slateford Road—it may not yet be too late—while I try St James' Street;" and I scribbled out a telegram and dropped it at the first station.

When I got out at Lothian Road Station, I had the satisfaction of learning from the policeman in waiting that M'Sweeny had received my message, and was off to Slateford by the common road. I took a cab over to St James' Street, but it never got that distance. As it was toiling up East Register Street I saw a woman bearing a bundle—a hand-basket and a child—"pauchling" up on the pavement, and I stopped the cab and jumped out before her. She gave a great start, and tried to brush past; but of course I could not allow that.

"Ah, Meg! what a chase you've given me," I cried, with a great sigh of relief. "I hope the child is all right?"

"What's that to you?" was the dogged reply. "What do you want with it?"

"To give it to its mother, of course. How could you do such a dastardly cruel thing?"

"I'm its mother!" she cried, with a blazing flash from her eyes. "It's my child! take it from me if you dare!"

"You'll have to prove that. Why, you know that not one of the children you've carried has really been your own. I've heard it too often not to know."

"Hear what you like—believe what you like—I can prove

that it's my child. I'd brain it before your eyes before I'd let you take it!"

There was such a dangerous and tiger-like look about her eyes that I made a spring at her in a moment, and with a sharp fight got the child out of her arms. It was in rags, and dirty enough, but I had little doubt of its identity; so I stuck to it in spite of her frantic struggles. A great crowd instantly gathered round, and I soon had plenty of assistance to hold her and get the handcuffs on her wrists. The fact was, the story of the abduction had spread over the whole city, causing the greatest anxiety and sympathy; and had I delayed much longer in getting her into the cab, I firmly believe she would have been torn to pieces before my eyes. As it was, the crowd did not disperse. No; they followed the cab up the Bridge in a great shouting, inquiring mass, which increased at every step.

"The child is found! the bairn is gotten! and the woman is catched, and the detective and all are in the cab!" echoed from mouth to mouth as the news flew like wildfire along the gaping foot-passengers, stopped in excitement and wonder on the pavement.

When we got to High Street the scene became indescribable. The greater part of the crowd were women, and they came from everywhere—stairs, close-mouths, and pends, in fluttering, struggling masses, fighting to get close to the cab, and declaiming and crying by turns. Policemen on their beats at the side had the greatest difficulty in getting close to the cab as a guard, and were nearly crushed among the wheels in keeping the crowd off the moving cab. But when we got out at the Office, I gave the woman up for lost. A wild yell rose on the air with such sudden intensity that the woman nearly fainted in our arms. We closed round her, but every inch of the way had to be fought for; and even after we got inside, the hoarse yells and cries followed us and increased in intensity.

They say that "bad news travels fast," but good news must travel faster. We had scarcely got time to breathe inside, when there was a rush and a scream of joy, and the mother had flown in and snatched the child from my arms.

"Oh, my bairn! my wee, wee bonny darling!" she screamed, kissing and hugging it in a way utterly beyond description. "And I thought I was never to see ye again! Oh! am I not happy this minute!" and then the kissing and tender fondling began again, till I was afraid she would either drop away in hysterics or go mad altogether.

The hoarse, croaking voice of the prisoner interrupted the endearments.

"Give me my child, and tell me why you have brought me here."

The mother started right round, with the joyful tears suddenly stayed, and slowly shrank back, with her eyes fixed on the dark face of the other, and straining the child closer and closer to her breast.

"So, it is you? I might have known it, Meg Malone, cruel, remorseless hag!—you know the child is not yours. Why should you try to rob me?"

"Rob you, indeed!" echoed the other, with a forced laugh. "Robbery to ask my own. Read that;" and she flung down a folded paper which she took from her breast.

The paper certified that on a certain day, eight months before, Margaret Maddox had duly reported the birth of her child to a certain Registrar in Glasgow. The paper directly proved nothing, but it staggered us a little. The mother, with quick intuition, reading our looks, suddenly burst into tears, dropped on her knees before the prisoner, and clasping her round the knees, with the most piteous and imploring look, cried—

"Oh, Meg! have mercy on me! have mercy on poor little Nelly that you once loved so well, and don't—don't—take my child. I will give you anything—all I have—and will work for you every day of my life, if you'll only leave me my boy. Say—say that it's mine, and I will kiss you—bless you! Oh, oh! have pity on me!"

There was only one pair of dry eyes in the room during the passionate appeal, and these were the prisoner's. She hurled back the woman at her feet with a curse.

"The child is mine!" she fiercely returned. "I shall not give it up!"

"Had your child any peculiar skin marks?" I interposed, with great excitement, addressing the mother.

"None," she wailed, wreathing her arms closer round the child. "None; but could I be mistaken with my own child?"

This woman-like answer would have satisfied some; but the law looks at these things in a way of its own; and we were in a worse fix than Solomon, for he knew what to do, and we did not. At this juncture, however, a strange incident happened which at once settled the difficulty. A black retriever dog, which hitherto had been unnoticed in the general excitement,

was now sniffing and poking with his nose at the child so closely hugged in the mother's arms. Suddenly the mother noticed it, gave a joyful scream, and then tremblingly set the sobbing child down on the floor before the dog. Then came a strange scene. The dog at once dabbed its nose against that of the child, gave a great bark and joyous gambol, and then familiarly seized the child by the waist, waited patiently till the child gripped it firmly by the ears, and then triumphantly trotted round the surprised and astonished group.

"See, see!" screamed the mother, "the dog knows its own wee darling! they both know each other! You won't take my child from me now?" and she wildly threw her arms round both dog and child.

"It is mine," persisted the prisoner, "and I shall not give it up."

"It is not yours!" I suddenly exclaimed,—at least till you have proved that this is not another of your false registrations. You got a year for that before, you will remember."

This almost random shot went straight home. She cowered and shrank and glared in such a way, that I had no longer a doubt.

"You will give me my child?" pleaded the mother, again on her knees before her.

"Take it, and my curse with it!"

There was a shout of joy and congratulation through that room as the prisoner hissed out the words; but the mother did not hear it, for with a scream of joy she dropped clean away in a hysterical swoon, and thus was carried out, with the child firmly wedged in her arms.

It took some weeks to collect all the evidence against Meg Maddox; and then she was tried and convicted on a double charge of false registry of birth and child-stealing. The sentence was four years' penal servitude, but she did not live to complete it; for being of a slothful nature, she managed to manufacture and swallow some copperas, with a view to making herself ill and getting into the hospital, and succeeded so well that she died. The fact that she had made a false entry about the time that the stolen child was born showed how long meditated had been her revengeful scheme; and I daresay, if all were known, she would have attempted it sooner, only the children happened to die before she could lay hands on them. At least this is the opinion of my staunch friend, Nelly O'Neil, and of her husband as well.

M'SWEENY AMONG SMUGGLERS.

It is said that fortune favours the brave. I would alter the proverb in M'Sweeny's case, and say that fortune favours the fearful and blundering. One thing I used to notice about my chum with a species of envy—however terrified, luckless, or idiotical he appeared in his actions, he generally came out quite as successful in the end as the rest of us. For me to make a slip was to lose the case—for M'Sweeny to blunder was often to open up the whole mystery, and lay it compactly in our hands—a bit of chance work which occurred so often that he had got to attribute the whole to his own superior intelligence. For instance, the heavy billet of wood which he used with such unerring swiftness upon the "Ghost of the Ring," he never tired of crowing about; and I had to admit that it was "singular" that he, the only one of the three who believed in ghosts, and feared their power, should be the only one at the critical moment able to use his hands. When I had ceded that much, he generally chose to interpret it to mean that he was the greatest and cleverest detective in the world, and went about for a day or two after with his head several inches higher in the air. I had an opinion of my own on the subject, but I kept it to myself.

One dull and blustering morning in March, a sharp, ferret-eyed gentleman, with a quick, business-like tread, that spoke of long rounds of the country taken on foot, appeared at the Office, and had a short interview with the Superintendent, who very promptly handed him and his business over to me, after introducing him as Mr George Eadie, supervisor for a long district on the east coast, and resident at a little place which I shall call Mossburn Mains.

"I wish your assistance in a very strange and mysterious case of smuggling, or illicit distilling—I can hardly decide which—that has pestered me for months upon months down at my quarter, and which seems as hopeless a task as ever to unravel," he began, as soon as I had accommodated him with a

seat. "We have all tried our hands at it—laid our heads together—ferreted and hunted—and yet seem as far from the solution as when we began."

"I fear that is a little out of my way," I replied, with some hesitation.

"Not a bit of it!" was the quick, cheerful reply; "I don't want you to do the hunting; I only require a good ferret—the simpler-looking the better—to work out the clues that I have got at with months of hard work.

"Very good. Just give me the facts, and I will soon decide if it is in my power to assist you."

"Well, the facts are not so conclusive as I could wish," he frankly continued. "If they had been, I should not have troubled you with the case. But meagre as they are, they seem to point to the guilty ones; only having got thus far, a hopeless mystery seems to envelope the whole affair, which baffles the keenest scrutiny. The first indication of a screw being loose somewhere was a curious fact, which, I believe, I myself was the first to notice, namely, that among the many drouthy customers along the coast where my district lies, there appeared to be a means of getting drink which nobody could account for. It was always brandy too. Now, when our fishermen vary from their coffee, they mostly drink good Scotch whisky; and as I have seen and tasted this suspected brandy, and found it to be a coarse Continental spirit, unreduced, and strong as liquid fire, I could only conclude that their reason for preferring it was that, on the whole, they found it cheaper. But whence did it come? That was the mystery. It did not come through any authorised dealers' hands: that I knew from the bitterness with which the latter spoke of the circumstances while confirming my suspicions. It was hurting their trade, and they were as furious and sore on the point as it was possible for me to feel. Now, I need hardly tell you, Mr M'Govan, that the days of running whole cargoes of contraband goods and hiding them ashore is long since past and gone. Such a thing is literally impossible, at least in my district. This being the case, we were forced to believe that some other means of carrying on the traffic than that had been adopted; and to get at the secret we looked around for some one among us flourishing upon no visible means of livelihood, and, after a long search, plumped upon two roystering devil-may-cares called M'Culloch. The two are brothers, unmarried, and living with their mother, and have tried nearly every trade in turn. They have been boat-

builders, fishermen, publicans, and fish-dealers, neglecting all and giving themselves up to dissipation and idleness ; but now, though they keep two boats lying idle, they appear to live and flourish upon nothing.

"That is common enough, even in the city here," I laughingly observed. "Well, what have you done to them?"

"Just what you would have done had they been thieves—watched them well."

"And did you catch them napping?"

"No ; and, what is worse, I got well laughed at for my pains," answered the supervisor, flushing at the recollection. "One thing I discovered after long watching, that mostly every night about dusk one of them—sometimes both—went out in one of their boats, just as an ordinary fishing-boat might go, but with this difference, that they returned in a few hours, while the fishers did not come back till morning. The second night after this discovery, sure of my prey, as I thought, I made my arrangements, and boarded and searched the boat whenever it appeared in sight."

"And got nothing?"

"Right—not a drop ; not as much as a flaskful carried in their pockets."

"Then you thought they were away to bring the stuff in—p'raps from some hiding-place?"

"I did."

"And where, pray, did you imagine the hide to be?"

"That was more than I could guess."

"Were you quite convinced that there was none concealed about the boat—no false bottom or hidden locker for instance?"

My visitor smiled.

"No ; I searched it thoroughly to the very boards that kept them from the water, as only an experienced supervisor knows how to search, and am satisfied that the boat contained not a drop of contraband liquor."

"Proceed : I can see that you have more to tell."

"You are right again. I was so enraged at being outwitted, especially before a crowd of grinning fools, all of them interested persons, that I secured the two brothers, and led the way to their cottage, which I searched inside and out—with like success."

"And then you let them off?"

"I had to : there was not a shadow of evidence against them. But indirectly, though I had to endure much jeering and chaffing,

the search and queer turn-up led to a useful bit of information, namely, that the brothers had a cousin called Craigie, serving as mate on board a Leith vessel, a lugger running between that port and Hamburg. Well, after a consultation with my superiors, it was decided to test whether or not I had stumbled on a clue; for, supposing the brandy to be brought from Hamburg to Leith, there might be many a hidden way of getting it along here and safe into hiding. Accordingly, we had the *Firefly* closely watched by a reliable hand at Hamburg; and his report, sent round to us by telegraph, was that, among other items, she had shipped three kegs of brandy."

"Good! Did you board her when she came in?"

"Didn't I? I had a strict set watch on the cottage of the brothers M'Culloch, and then went to Leith myself to be present when she was boarded by the revenue officers."

"And did you find the three kegs?"

"Not a ghost of them was to be found: they were gone!"

"Strange. Perhaps the mate had smelt danger and thrown them overboard?"

"No; they are not given to wasting such valuable stuff."

"Then perhaps the two brothers had dropped alongside and relieved them of the burden as they came in?"

"No! Here is a puzzling thing. The brothers were not once a dozen yards from their cottage during the whole of the night in which the vessel must have been passing up the Forth; they even chatted carelessly and unconcernedly with my men during the greater part of the time I was absent."

"Confident of their security, probably," I interposed. "Does this finish your case?"

"Very nearly. The only other thing that I have noted worth repeating is, that the first thing this morning, Tom M'Culloch, the elder of the two, sent out for a newspaper containing the shipping arrivals for Leith; and among the said arrivals, of course, I found noted that of the *Firefly*."

"Ah! that does not go for much, because his anxiety to look for the vessel's name might be assumed to arise from concern for his cousin's welfare," I returned. "Now, what would you like us to do for you?"

"Simply to ferret out the secret how the brandy is spirited into their keeping, and where it is kept while it is being doled out to their customers. You see they keep the secret to themselves, so there is not the slightest danger of betrayal; and for me to try to get the information out of them would be as

preposterous as for you to ask a professional thief if he would kindly furnish you with evidence to transport him."

I thought for a moment, and then said, "Well, I think I can help you. My own face is one that does not disguise well. In daylight I am policeman-like in any garb, if you understand. But my chum M'Sweeney could try his hand at a make-up—a tramp or a travelling basket-maker would do—and he is as Irish as a peat, so he will have little difficulty in sustaining the character. I am interested in your story, however, and am willing to accompany you home to superintend the working of the thing, if our arrival can be arranged in a way unlikely to excite comment."

"The very thing! nothing could be more easy," eagerly rejoined the delighted exciseman. "My house is nearly a mile from the hamlet on the shore, and you need not stir a foot beyond the door till your man brings in his report. But are you quite sure of him? Will he not blunder in any way?"

"If he does, you may thank your stars," I laughingly returned, "for then you'll be sure to get to the bottom of the mystery. M'Sweeney will do more good by a blunder at times than another would with the best of clues."

This ended our talk in private. I called in M'Sweeney, and as rapidly as possible primed him in his part; and then the most ragged and rory garb was raked out and put on his big frame, and with a bunch of basket willows swung over his shoulder, and a few borrowed tools in his pocket, he got down to the station nearest to Mossburn Mains, while the supervisor and myself drove leisurely out in that direction in the gig which had brought him. We arrived just in time to sit down to a capital dinner, in the discussing of which we waited for M'Sweeney or his report to turn up.

Meanwhile my chum had not been idle. The train had set him down nearly two miles from the hamlet containing the cottage of the M'Cullochs; but the road ran past a good many fishers' houses, and he was actually asked to stop and mend some of their baskets and creels, which proposal he readily accepted with this proviso, that they were all to fetch the articles to a certain point further along, where he intended resting for the day. The said point was a flat of tangly grass in front of the M'Cullochs' cottage; and M'Sweeney's readiness will not be wondered at when it is known that his own trade, before turning policeman, was basket-making. The spies of the super-

visor had all been withdrawn in the morning before he had started from Edinburgh, so the coast was quite clear for M'Sweeny, and the birds not likely to be shy. It was quite a lonely spot, at the extremity of the hamlet, close to the beach, and almost opposite the hoary Bass Rock, which, with its precipitous sides and flocks of screaming birds, rose abruptly out of the sea a few miles off.

Planting himself in a sheltered spot, directly in front of the cottage, the fiery-faced, ragged-looking basket-maker set to work upon the articles brought to him, and soon had a knot of idlers gathered in a circle about him. The various little jobs were executed with wonderful expertness, but the price demanded so jarred upon the feelings of the economical fishers that the rush of custom soon dwindled away, and very speedily he found himself deserted by all but one, and that one was the last who had joined the group—a powerful-looking fellow in fisherman's rough trousers and blue shirt, lazily smoking in the cold sunshine, and eyeing M'Sweeny's movements in grim silence. The man was Tom M'Culloch, the elder of the two brothers, as M'Sweeny had guessed by seeing him emerge from the suspected den. At first he had eyed the basket-maker with lowering suspicion, then he relaxed a little at the voluble wrangle between M'Sweeny and the fishers' wives about the price of the repairs of their creels, and finally had continued to eye the dirty tramp in thoughtful silence after every one else was gone. M'Sweeny took out his pipe, grunting audibly against "the thunderin' chates of the world that 'ud ax a man to work for nothing, and provide his own stuff;" and then, after feeling in his pocket for a match, and being disappointed as naturally as possible, he turned to the one loungee for a touch from his pipe or a light from his fire. To his surprise it was at once tendered, and after a deal of roundabout talk he got at the secret of the conciliation.

"Could you do a little job for me?" said M'Culloch, with assumed indifference—"I mean if I were to pay you your own price, and let you sit inside the house while you do it?"

"Will a hungry man ate—will a duck swim in a pond?" cried M'Sweeny, with real alacrity. "Av coorse, I will—as many as ye like. What is it now that ye want done?"

"Come in and I'll show you" was the cautious reply; and, after helping him to gather up his stuff and tools, the man led the way in through the cottage to a back room, where M'Sweeny was lowered upon for some minutes by an ugly oil hag and the

other brother Jim, till his conductor re-appeared with a long narrow basket filled with cross-bars like a bottle basket, but only capable of holding one long row. M'Sweeny stared at the queer thing with deep interest and real curiosity, conscious that the smuggler was watching and reading every one of the expressions flitting over his face.

"Well, what in the name of goodness is that thing for, if a body may ax?" he broke out at last, taking the queer long basket in his hand and examining it closely. "Faugh! it stinks like an ould haddie, or worse—like a fish-wife. Do you keep id soakin' in the salt say?"

"Never mind what it's for—say for carrying eggs," darkly returned the other. "But get the holes in it mended as fast as you like."

"Ye've been tryin' yer hand at that yersilf," remarked M'Sweeny, with a twinkle of the eye, as he noted the patches here and there with bits of twine and fishing-net. "Wor some of the eggs tumblin' out at the bottom?"

"Yes, you've guessed it."

"Och! well, it's a quare thing intirely. Why, the two parts put together make it nearly as long as a boat."

The words were simply uttered, as M'Sweeny often afterwards stated, and as I can readily believe; but they caused instantaneous and visible consternation in the queer nest into which he had dropped. The brother sitting moodily by the fire started to his feet with an oath, and turned fiercely upon M'Sweeny, while the old hag looked as if she could have spat venom on him enough to burn him up on the spot. M'Sweeny saw by the glare of the six eyes that he had made a slip, though quite unconsciously, and, like most blunderers, he proceeded to flounder deeper into the mire in the vain endeavour to smooth the thing over.

"What did you mean by that?" breathed the elder of the brothers, with a cold distinctness that made M'Sweeny shiver at the heart and wish himself well out of the house.

"Saint Patrick! what 'ud ye have me say?" blurted out M'Sweeny; "it's as long as a boat if it was hung outside—in the wather, ye know; but that's not what it's for, I can see. More be token, it's for houldin' bottles in—"

A sharp oath from the brothers stopped his voluble speech; and then he heard them consult with their heads close, in hurried whispers; while the words, "Kick him out, and tell him to leave the place at once;" "No, strangle him, he knows too

much," did not help to brighten his spirits. Still, he would shove his unlucky tongue in, right or wrong—

"Ye see, there's no use of us quarrellin' about a trifle like that," he smoothly remarked, putting on an innocent and unconcerned face. "Ye've towld me the basket's for carryin' eggs in, and I believe it. I suppose ye gather them out at the Bass Rock there, where the birds are flyin' wild in thousands?"

Singularly enough, the blundering remark appeared to utterly petrify the whole three. They stared at M'Sweeney in abject dismay and terror, as if it were now their turn to fear.

"There's something about the Bass Rock that touches them," thought M'Sweeney, with quick intelligence. "I'll try them wid that again."

"Who—who—told you about the Bass Rock?" stammered Tom M'Culloch, at last finding his voice. "I thought you were a stranger in the place?"

"So I am, and hope to the Lord I'll keep so," fervently returned M'Sweeney. "My own opinion is, that all the paiple in this place are mad. But about the Bass Rock—I've heard often of it, though I've never been there. There's a power of holes in it, I suppose, for the birds to make nests in and drop their eggs in; and some of 'em—so I've heard—are worn into caves big enough to hould a dozen men."

The brothers exchanged dark looks, the whispering was resumed even more excitedly than before, and then the elder brother turned to M'Sweeney with a hoarse laugh—

"Some one has been having a little fun at your expense, I'm afraid," he remarked, with ill-disguised uneasiness. "I've been all my days about this quarter, and been all round the Bass as often as there are hairs in my head, and I never saw a single hole or cave about it."

"D'ye mane to say I'm a liar?" cried M'Sweeney, in pretended rage, and now anxious to get out of the place. "I say there's holes—thousands of holes—in that Rock—there!"

The brothers exchanged glances.

"He wants kicking out at the door," remarked the younger.

"What's that ye say!" yelled M'Sweeney at the pitch of his voice, dashing down his tools and stuff, whipping off his crownless hat, and spitting into his hands with a mad caper in the air. "Whoop! hurroo! It's a fight ye want! Come on—the three av yez;" and the wild-looking Irishman went bobbing over the cottage floor like an india-rubber ball, squaring defiantly at

each of them in turn. For a moment the brothers shrank before the great wallopings and the heavy tackety boots—one stamp of which would have crushed their toes to jelly; and then, sidling round and watching their opportunity, they closed on the seeming madman with a rush, and bore him, struggling and yelling, towards the door, now held open by the old woman. With a run they had him over the threshold; and then one of their toes flew forward, and sent him with terrific impetus forward on the grass.

"There's holes, ye murderin' thaves! there's holes, in thousands!" shouted M'Sweeny, as if anxious for the last word. The next moment bang came his bunch of willows right in his face from inside the cottage-door, he went flop back on the grass again, and the cottage-door was slammed to, with the savage words—

"Go and seek them then!"

M'Sweeny looked round through the deepening twilight, saw that he was alone on the green, and speedily scrambled to his feet, and snatched up his stuff and tools.

"Go and seek them!" he echoed, with a soft laugh to himself. "By japers! that's the very thing I'll be after doin' this minute;" and like a swift shadow he glided off, along the shore, and up the quiet road leading to the house of the supervisor.

We received him with open arms, and while he was refreshing himself after his hard work, listened to the minute account of all he had done, seen, and heard; but the moment he mentioned the "holes in the Bass Rock," and the excitement and alarm of the brothers, the hands of Mr Eadie came together like a shot, his whole face beamed with joy and delight, and springing round the table, he seized M'Sweeny's hand and shook it, as if indebted to my chum for life.

"I've got at the mystery now," he cried, turning to me. "But to make sure of not being laughed at this time, I will visit the hide alone, unless you feel inclined for a row on the water."

"Are you going to the Bass Rock?" I asked, with a twinkling eye.

"I am."

"Then I'll go with you," said I.

"And so will I," echoed M'Sweeny. "Begorra! I'd like to see them same holes he talked so much about; it's my belief there's something in them he was frightened about, and not birds' eggs either."

Leaving the dining-room, we were conducted by Mr Eadie to a bedroom at the back, where he produced three heavy suits, such as are worn by the Coastguard, and in these we attired ourselves amid much laughing and joking. M'Sweeny in particular appeared to draw a kind of tarry inspiration from the seafaring garb, and strutted about before the mirror, offering to shake hands with himself, hitching up his trowsers in sailor fashion, and airing all the scraps of sea lingo at his command.

"Belay there, and tip us your flipper!" he cried to his reflection in the mirror. "Fetch me a marlingspike, and throw the painter overboard, pots and all! Ahoy! ahoy! Heave the lead, while I run up aloft and brace up the helm!" and the fiery face worked itself into a purple glow over imaginary sailors' attitudes.

"Are you com-ing?" I bellowed in his ear, tugging him back by the nape of the neck.

"Ay, ay, yer honour!" he said, starting round, with sea man-like alacrity, and with a clumsy burlesque of a sailor's tug and scrape. "Ahoy! all hands on deck, for the ship's engine's afire, and there's six feet of water in the captain's hold! Begorra, Jamie! I ought to have been a sailor—it's myself could tip id off."

But I was off, out of the house, and following Mr Eadie by a quick cut across the fields to that part of the shore where his own boat lay moored. The wind was rising, too, and I had to stoop and fight with it to keep up with the supervisor's erect figure. Down at the shore I found that M'Sweeny had kept up with me nobly, but was now eyeing the rough sea rather ruefully.

"Hadn't I better stay on shore here, and watch that the divils don't interfere wid ye, Jamie?" he suggested, with palpable fear, as he saw us rocking in the boat.

"No; you go with us," I sharply returned. "In with you, quick. You know you should have been a sailor."

"True for you," he returned, quite elated with the flattery, and jumping in at once. "Ahoy! ahoy! Tip us your flipper—"

"Stop; you said that bit before," I hoarsely shouted in his ear, tugging down my hat to save it from being swept away by the wind. But M'Sweeny had now recovered his courage and his devilment, and finding that the motion of the boat was steadier off shore, he started to his feet with a wild whoop, frantically waving his sou'-wester over his head.

"Hurroo! all hands to the anchor!—brace the stern sheets to the topgallant—hard up! ease her off—three sheets in the wind! ah-o-y!"

"Fool! sit down, unless you want to capsize the boat and send us all down as food for the fishes," I snappishly cried; but the injunction was hardly needed, for before the words were out of my mouth, a lurch of the boat took the feet from M'Sweeney, and sent him sprawling backwards all his length in the boat; and when he got himself gathered together, it was found that the sou'-wester lent him by Mr Eadie was gone.

"Hi! hi! a man overboard!" shouted the irrepressible M'Sweeney, rubbing his bumped skull with one hand, while he waved the other above his head to an imaginary crew. "Man the life-boat, ahoy!"

Presently his cries became more subdued, and at last, to my astonishment, they ceased altogether. Looking round I found him anxiously examining the gunwale of the boat, doubtless to see that it was all right. I spoke to him, but a groan was the only reply; and then I saw his two hands grasp the gunwale, and his head go further over the side, as if he were preparing for a tremendous header down among the fishes. I shouted again, using one of his own sea phrases to try and rouse him, but a spasmodic movement of the lower extremities now showed that M'Sweeney was too far gone to give a verbal reply. We had reached the caves in the Bass Rock before he looked up, and then his face was pitifully white and woe-begone.

"Och, Jamie, but I'm bad, bad!" he groaned out. "I think the dinner disagreed wi' me. Let's get out on firm ground—the bare rock or anything—for the rockin' of that boat has quite taken the heart out of me."

Our exploration was both rough and unpleasant, and lasted a good deal longer than we had anticipated. Fortunately, we had taken the precaution to bring a good supply of lights with us, and at last, in the largest and deepest of the wet holes, we came upon a heap of stones and gravel that flashed suspiciously under the strong glare. A few kicks and a vigorous scraping with our hands brought us to something bulky and smooth; and then M'Sweeney, leaning forward over our shoulders with the light, showed that we had discovered—three kegs of brandy! Had the cave only been high enough, I believe Mr Eadie would have danced and leaped with joy.

"Let's lift them into the boat and take them ashore with

us," he suggested ; but almost before the words were spoken we heard the sudden grating of a boat on the rock without, and then the voice of a man shouting out—

" Fool ! put out that light ! "

" It's Tom M'Culloch ! " whispered the supervisor, trembling with excitement, and dashing out the light in an instant. " What could have been more lucky ? They have started, as usual, from different points, to avoid suspicion, and he thinks his brother is in here before him. "

The crunching of a man's heel on the rock at the mouth of the cave put an end to the whisper, and then we heard the smuggler groping his way towards the spot on which we stood.

" Where are you, Tom ? Have you seen any of Eadie's men abroad ? " he said, speaking into the thick darkness. " Unhook the baskets from the keel of your boat, and we'll fill the bottles and be off. Hullo ! D—n ! "

We were upon him with one great grapple, struggling, twisting, and shouting, till he was down on the wet rock, pinned helpless, with M'Sweeny snapping a pair of handcuffs on his wrists. Then M'Sweeny coolly assumed the sou'-wester of his prisoner and helped to bundle him into the boat, into which Mr Eadie and I threw ourselves to tow him round to the other side of the rock, there to moor him and the boat out of harm's way, while we should try to secure his brother, whom we expected every minute to appear. The task was by no means an easy one, owing to the difficulty of finding a fit mooring place ; and while we were gone, strange doings were taking place in the cave we had left. M'Sweeny, left alone in the dark to watch the kegs till our return, would have consoled himself with a smoke, but he had been strictly commanded not to strike a light. Nothing, however, had been said against whistling, and so, whistle he did, both loudly and shrilly, till the grating of a boat outside told him, as he thought, of our return.

" Are you there, Jim ? " cried the new comer, fastening up his boat against the Rock, passing over towards M'Sweeny, and then stopping to listen.

" Yes, " grunted M'Sweeny, in the hoarsest tone he could assume.

" Well, there's the augur, and the jug, and the spill's inside of it ; take them till I unhook the baskets with the bottles. "

Some articles were handed through the darkness, which my chum mechanically grasped and laid on the floor of the

cave ; and then M'Sweeney saw the smuggler lie down on his belly close to the boat, and slowly and laboriously unhook from the keel the identical long baskets that he had been asked that afternoon to repair—with this difference, that every cross-bar now guarded a bottle.

“Ha, ha, Jim! The supervisor thinks himself sharp,” chuckled the new comer, as he raised himself from the water's edge ; “but, with all his sharpness, it'll be long ere he looks here for the stuff. Won't it?”

M'Sweeney did not dare to answer, but grunted to the best of his ability, wishing heartily for our return. As ill-luck would have it, in grasping the end of the queer basket, he let it slip from his hands, and was greeted with a storm of oaths from the smuggler.

“Curse you ! you're drunk !” cried the enraged new comer. “You've been at the kegs already—swigging away as hard as you could ever since you came !”

“Holy Moses ! did a man ever here the like ? and I haven't tasted a blessed drop since I landed !” cried M'Sweeney, in his strongest brogue, quite forgetting himself, as he again felt the weight of the smuggler's foot behind him ; and then, with a great shout of surprise and amazement, the other was on him, and the two grappled in a deadly embrace.

At the same moment our boat rounded the Rock, and we shot in towards the cave just as the two went toppling forward into the water. There was a great splash and shout ; but after a moment or two M'Sweeney's head appeared alone, bobbing distractedly in the water, as he made desperate efforts to catch the edge of our boat.

“Give us a lift in, Jamie !” he panted, clinging wildly to the gunwale, “or by japers, the world 'ill lose by it.”

“Say flipper—say tip us your flipper, or I sha'n't do it,” I mischievously shouted as I bent forward ; and then, in a wild torrent, he poured forth his entire stock of sea lingo.

Tugging him sharply into the boat, we set about searching for the missing smuggler ; but he had dived and come up at a safer spot, from which he had found some means of escaping, for he was afterwards heard of from the other side of the Atlantic as being both alive and hearty. Trundling the three kegs into the boat, and mooring the other to it, we rowed round to where we had left the smuggler and boat first captured. To our amazement, both boat and man were gone !

“While we've been fooling about the cave and rocks looking

for the second, he has dived, swam round, and helped off the other," cried the supervisor, in deep chagrin. "Never mind; we've got the stuff, and we'll easily secure them to-morrow."

Thus consoling himself, he rowed us ashore, M'Sweeny now loudly lamenting that he had not only lost his sou'-wester, but a pair of good handcuffs into the bargain.

Next morning the whole place was hunted through, but the brothers had showed a clean pair of heels, and the mother, of course, could not well be proceeded against. But the detection and fright were quite as effectual as if they had been caught and imprisoned; and, so far as I am aware, there has not been another case of the kind in the locality since. Of course, M'Sweeny has always taken to himself the whole credit of his superior sagacity in discovering the secret store of the smugglers.

A DRUNKARD'S LAST BOUT.

JOHN HOLMAN, letter carrier in the Edinburgh district, was a drunkard. I give him that name without hesitation, though, had it been spoken in his ears in one of his sober moments, it would have startled him. The fact is, he had come to it gradually, as all drunkards do. After his wife's death he had become a tippler, then a sot, and now he was merging into a confirmed drunkard. Why he still retained his post has been accounted for to me in various ways. In the first place, he was very clever, as heavy drinkers often are; and, in the second, up to that time, as far as I know, he had been perfectly honest. Still, in spite of every effort made by friends and acquaintances to conceal his fault and make him pass muster, he now retained his post by a slender hold indeed. He had been degraded from sorter to carrier, two or three times reprimanded, and once suspended; and now he distinctly understood that the next discovered fault would mark his last hour in the service.

What desperate efforts and straits his boy and girl had been put to at times to sober him up so as to pass muster at the post-office, and what runs with his letters they had both taken when he had got drunk and reckless of consequences, I need not pause here to describe. His girl had been fairly frightened from the house, by ill-usage and hunger, into service; and now the whole care devolved on the boy, a sickly lad of twelve.

The reader now sees the position. Holman stood on a pinnacle, and a mere feather's-weight might send him toppling into a depth of misery and shame from which there would be little or no hope of redemption. More I may tell: the fatal step was about to be taken, and whether destruction was to follow or not depended entirely on this same sickly boy. Bobbie Holman, therefore, becomes the little hero of this sketch.

It was a sultry afternoon in August, and Holman was busy with his last delivery for that day. He was tired—completely

exhausted—for excessive drinking weakens fearfully; but fatigue was the most trifling part of his sufferings. A drinking bout the night before had left him with a “crave” that nothing would “kill.” The agony of this terrible craving, I am told, must be felt to be understood. To satisfy it, no crime seems at the moment too monstrous, and no action too mean or degrading, and the desperation of the sufferer is a near approach to madness itself. All this I could believe, even if I had only Holman’s case to judge by.

He ascended a common stair in Arthur Street with a letter enclosed in a blue envelope in his hand. He ought to have gone to the top, but he did not. About half-way up, in bending the letter between his fingers, he felt something hard inside—hard and round. He paused and felt it all over—it was a coin. He weighed it on the ends of his fingers, and for the first time had an inkling why a not very thick letter had two penny stamps stuck up in the corner. The coin was heavy—therefore gold. So he reasoned; but the thought came with a sickening qualm. More: it brought a cold sweat oozing out on his brow, and caused his legs to tremble beneath him. A gold coin—a sovereign, perhaps—twenty shillings—trembling on the ends of his fingers!—what could it not do?

That thought was the first step to crime. I have no room for the rush of conflicting emotions that followed the suggestion, as he afterwards minutely described them to me. I can only give bare facts. He looked round him. The stair was gloomy and still, and not a being in sight. He hastily thrust the letter into his breast-pocket, ran down, got out of the stair as if a horde of fiends were in pursuit of him, finished his delivery, and made for his own home in Richmond Street. The first step was taken, but he was still fighting. More than once he paused on his way, put his hand in his breast, and half turned to go back. Two forces were struggling for mastery, but the stronger impelled him homewards, with the stolen letter in his pocket. His house was but a room and a bed-closet. As he got within the door, he saw that the closet door was ajar. He listened breathlessly. There was no sound of any one stirring.

“Are you there, Bobbie?” he said, softly.

There was no answer.

“Poor boy! he’s asleep,” he whispered to himself, approaching the closet on tip toe, and glancing in on the pale face and closed eyes. “I’m glad of it. He would read what I’ve done in my eyes if he were awake. I’m to do it—yes, I’m to

do it!" he feverishly added. "Nothing can save me now: it was ordained that I was to be a thief."

With this stoical reflection, he slunk to the empty fireplace and sat down. He did not think of it, but he was in direct line with the crevice in the closet-door, at the hinges, behind which his boy lay in bed. He took out the fatal letter, opened a penknife with a shaking hand, and was about to rip up the end of the envelope, when he noticed that the flap was not very rigidly gummed down. He crushed it so as to make the sides bulge, slipped in his finger at the opening, and then looked with a disappointed air at the empty grate.

"If I had only some hot water!" he muttered, pausing; but of course the thing did not come for the wishing.

Seeing that he had stolen the letter, and had no intention now of delivering it, it is not easy to understand why he did not at once tear it open. But a kind of moth-and-candle fluttering, or dallying, is common in crime. I have seen it hundreds of times. And then, of course, there was a possibility that he had mistaken the value of the coin. It might be only a farthing, in which case he could have re-inserted it and delivered the letter. He set to work in an ingenious manner to extract the coin without opening or tearing the envelope. Crushing the edges together, and manipulating the note inside with the point of the penknife, his patience was at length rewarded. A sudden shake brought out the glittering yellow coin, and sent it rolling along the floor. But before it had clattered on the floor, a sudden creak in the bed-closet had made him start up and conceal the letter.

"Are you awake, Bobbie?" he hoarsely whispered, in a tone that startled himself.

There was no answer, but in its place the sound of heavy and regular breathing.

"Asleep, fast asleep," muttered the guilty man, pressing his hand on his heart to stay its quick beatings. "It's gold! a sovereign! I wish I had not done it."

Yet he stooped and greedily clutched the coin. The crackle of the letter in his hand attracted his attention.

"I must burn it," he whispered. "No fire? Where's the matches? If I tear it up ever so small, some one might find a scrap and recognise the writing; if I take it with me, I might get drunk and lose it. I must hide it. Where? The mantelpiece ornament, inside. No one would think of looking for it there. So!"

He folded it small, crushed it inside a stucco ornament, replaced the figure, and then, with another fearful glance towards the closet, slipped from the house on tiptoe. As soon as his footsteps had quite died away, there was a violent creaking of the bed in the closet, and a sudden spring; and then the door was drawn open by a boy, who with eyes widely distended, and a face white with excitement, staggered forth and groaningly sank on his knees beside a chair.

"I saw him do it! A whole sovereign! Oh, dear! oh, dear! what shall I do?" he wailed, rocking too and fro in agony, with his head buried in his hands. "I must save him; and yet I'm so weak, I can hardly crawl across the floor. But how am I to save him? If I could only pray now, p'raps God would give me strength for a wee while; but my head's all in a whirl. But how did I get over this length? I never seem to feel the weakness. That's queer. I think it's the fear has done it. I'm strong; yes, there's no doubt of it. I can grip the chair, firm and steady, and my legs don't shake under me. Oh! if I could only think, or if I had some one to advise me. But I haven't; and I must keep it all to myself, or he'll be transported—transported as a thief."

A wild burst of tears here came to his relief; and shook his delicate frame from head to foot; and then he calmly rose and took down the stucco figure.

"The letter is here; I saw him hide it. He did not tear it either. Perhaps I could smooth it out and deliver it yet. But the sovereign—where am I to get a sovereign?"

The answer did not come readily, and his feverish anxiety increased.

"I must get it somehow, or he's lost!" he whispered to himself. "He has told me often that money is often put in the letters by the Post-office themselves, just to try if the men are honest. I must get a sovereign. Oh! I wish I could be the thief instead of him!"

Anxiety and love for his father prompted the words; but they in turn suggested another thought, which made his flushed face whiten to the very roots of his hair.

"No, I couldn't do that," he said, struggling to banish the temptation. "I couldn't turn thief. But then to save my father?—one should be ready to do a lot for their father; and the drink's been in his head for so many days that he doesn't know what he's about. It would be so nice to be shut up in prison and think that he was all right and safe. Oh! mother,

mother ! if you were only here now, we could save him between us."

The pitiful wail brought more tears, but no suggestion of importance. He thought of his sister.

"I wonder how far it is to Dumfries? I wonder if I could walk there in a night? I'm afraid it's too far, for it cost her a deal of money to go, and a letter would take a day to go, and then it would be too late. And then she mightn't have a sovereign yet. No, I must try something else. There's auntie! I did not think of her. She hates father, but I think she likes me. I'll go!"

Hurriedly squeezing the letter back into the bottom of the stucco figure, he hastily dressed and left the house, locking the door after him, and hanging the key on a nail outside. Perhaps it would have been better had he taken the letter with him, but of course he could not anticipate everything.

It was a long way to the New Town, and Bobbie was very white and weak, and unaccustomed to the fresh air; but there was something within him that kept him up and completely shut out the wondering faces on the way. He saw neither green grass, trees, houses, nor staring passengers; but he saw the looming outlines of a visionary prison, and kept speculating faintly as to whether it was to receive his father or himself. His mother's sister was an old maid, housekeeper to a gentleman, and it was long since Bobby had been able to go as far; so he paused in some awe and trepidation before ringing the bell. He thought he would sit down on the step till he could make up his mind. He did so, and the tears presently came crowding into his eyes, and he was busy trying to knuckle them away, so that nobody should see; and did not notice that the door had been opened till he heard his aunt's cheery voice at his back, and felt himself lifted and carried into the house.

"What, Bobbie! my wee Bobbie! and crying too!" she said, in delighted surprise. "How did you get so far? Has that brute been ill-using you again?"

Bobbie opened his eyes, and the tears dried up with remarkable quickness.

"Brute?" he echoed. "You don't mean—mean—my father?"

"But I do—him and nobody else," was the dauntless reply.

"I don't think he's a brute, auntie, and he never ill-uses me," said Bobbie, in a soft, winning way. "He's awful kind to me; oh! you don't know him!"

"Don't I?—the drunken brute ! I think I've cause. Mine your mother's dead, Bobbie."

"Ah !—ah !—I know that," was the wailing reply ; and then Bobbie choked, and choked, and the tears would come in spite of knuckling, or desperate winking, or anything he could think or do ; and at last he had fairly to give way, and cover his face with his hands and have it out. She did not check him or upbraid him for wetting and staining the grand furniture with his tears ; on the contrary, she looked as if she could actually have helped him with her own. She drew the poor neglected boy closer, so that he could not see her own eyes, and said, by way of diverting his thoughts to something else—

"I thought you were too weak to walk so far, Bobbie?"

"So did I till I tried," was the truthful answer, as, with a pang and a flutter, he remembered his errand. "But it was a kind of desperate strength that came into me all of a sudden. Oh, auntie ! I want you to help me."

"I will. Don't fluster yourself ; you're all in a fever now," feelingly returned the aunt, who really loved the boy. "What is it you want?"

But this question seemed suddenly to pull him up. He reddened and whitened by turns, hung his head, poked with his toe at the rich carpet, and then in low tones stammered out—

"It's something great—I'm afraid you will not do it. But, oh, auntie ! if you only knew the good it would do !"

"If it's to help you in any way, I'll do it. Don't be afraid, speak out," was the encouraging reply.

Still he hesitated.

"I think you're pretty fond of me, auntie—aren't you?" he said, in a quiet way, that made her heart warm towards him.

"Yes, I am ;" and she drew him close and stroked his hair fondly.

"And you remember what you told me long ago," he continued, his words getting slower and slower—"that you had a lot of money put away—ten pounds, I think—that I was to get when you were dead?"

"Yes, that's true ; and you shall have it, and nobody else, I'll take care of that, Bobbie,—and perhaps a good deal more besides."

"Ah ! but I don't want you to die," said Bobbie, with his eyes filling again ; "I want you to live a long time—an awful long time—longer than me or father either ; and I don't want any money when you're dead—if—if—"

"If what?"

"If you'll give me a sovereign now."

Bobbie got the words out, but his agitation, for a boy, was something fearful.

"What is it for?"

The four words were simply enough spoken, but they ran through him like as many sharp knives. In the horrible pause that followed, he felt at one moment as if every vein were on fire, and the next as if frozen into ice.

"Oh, auntie! don't look at me that way!" he piteously burst forth at last; "I can't tell you what it's for, nor nothing about it—indeed, I can't; but it's something awful good and right. You would say so yourself if you only knew all about it."

There was something so pitiful in the boy's look that she felt inclined to give him the money and let him go; but another thought drew her back and steeled her heart against granting the request.

"Ah, Bobbie! I see how it is: your father, the drunken brute, is making a victim and a go-between of you. It's for him you want the sovereign."

If Bobbie had looked guilty and confused before, he looked doubly so now; and yet he knew she was wrong.

"But it's not for drink—oh, it's not for drink, auntie!" he wildly pleaded. "I know it's not; and you know I wouldn't tell a lie about it."

"I know you wouldn't. That's why you do not deny that it's for him. Look, Bobbie! if I were rolling in wealth—buried up to neck and ears in sovereigns—if one of them would save him from death, I would not give it!"

She had risen in her excitement, and now stood before him with flushed cheeks, brightened eyes, and compressed lips. The unalterable determination written in her face seemed to drop a pall on his heart. For a moment everything seemed shut out from his gaze. His chair seemed to sway under him; and then, with an effort, he straightened himself, and picked up his little cap from the floor. He felt calm—wonderfully calm.

"I think I'll go away now," he slowly and distinctly got out.

His tones were so altered that his aunt grasped him by the shoulder and peered curiously into his face.

"Where are you going, Bobby?" she asked tenderly.

"To get the sovereign—without you."

The same even tones—the same rigid face. His aunt began to feel alarmed.

“You think me harsh, Bobbie—unkind!” she said, with tears now gathering in her own eyes. “You will learn to hate me. Ah! you do not know me!”

“I don’t think you harsh, and I’m awful fond of you,” was the steady reply, given without a smile. “Good-bye.”

He allowed her to kiss him and shake his hand, and then turned to go.

“Stop a moment, Bobbie, and have something to eat.”

He smiled now, but such a smile! Its strangeness sent a pang of indefinable terror and remorse to her heart.

“No, auntie, I couldn’t eat. P’raps I’ll never eat any more.”

It was all he said. She watched him in amazement walking out of the grand lobby, and softly pulling to the door after him; and then with the last glimpse of his figure a revulsion came. She covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

“I don’t care what it’s for—I’ll give him the money,” she said, with quick resolution. “I’ll call him back.”

She ran and opened the door; but was she just that moment too late. Bobbie was gone—lost to sight.

“I’ve a good mind to run along and try to find him,” she said.

I wish she had done so. I wish she had run every inch of the way, hunted every street in Edinburgh, run the boots off her feet, till she found him. But she didn’t. No, it was ordered otherwise.

About half-an-hour later two plain working men were standing at the head of the Bridge, close to the Tron, chatting merrily, and comparing watches with each other and the clock above them, when suddenly a pale delicate-looking boy, who had stopped and eyed them hungrily, darted forward, snatched at one of the watches, tugged it free with a wrench, darted round and down Niddry Street, and vanished. Yes, vanished; for though there was an instantaneous shout and rush after him, by the time the crowd reached the bottom of the steep little street, they discovered that they were chasing—nothing! The fact was, that the thief, immediately after turning the corner, had cut into a stair leading up to the South Bridge, and at the same moment one or two professional thieves, thinking that he was one of themselves, took up the cry and led the halloo past the stair and down the street. But the young

thief was not one of themselves. No ; slowly and reluctantly as I may bring it out, he was—Bobbie Holman.

"I am a thief now—a common street robber !" he gasped, as he panted up the stair, and out on the Bridge. "Did I ever think it would come to that ? And I used to pray every night at my mother's knee. But it's all for father. Oh ! if I can only be in time to save him, I don't care what they do to me. How fast I ran ! I don't know where all the strength came from."

Eager and excited though he was, he had to restrain himself and only walk, for fear of attracting attention. Still he went fast, very, and got to the pawnshop in Richmond Street before he was aware. He had often been there before, and the man greeted him with a kindly nod and smile. For the first time he now stood before the man a thief, and had it not been for the terrible excitement within, the tears would have rushed into his eyes at the thought.

"Well, Bobbie, what have you got now ?"

Bobbie could not get out a word, but he tremblingly tendered the stolen watch. The man looked at it. It was only silver, but an excellent English lever. In that fearful pause Bobbie lived an age of agony.

"I'll lend you thirty shillings on it. Will that do ?" were the first words that broke in on his whirling senses.

"A sovereign, only a sovereign !" he gasped out in reply, with every syllable choking him.

"A sovereign ? Oh, well, it'll be the easier lifted again," said the pawnbroker, who was quite accustomed to such arrangements. He laid a half-sovereign on the counter, after making out the ticket, and was about to count down the remainder in silver, when Bobbie interposed in feverish haste—

"A sovereign ; have you not a sovereign ?"

"Well, yes, I daresay I have ; but this is quite the same."

"No—a sovereign. I want a sovereign. Oh ! do be quick, I'm in such a hurry," pleaded Bobbie, with such agony in his look that the man hurriedly acceded to what seemed to him a mere idle whim.

A heavy clanking sovereign was thrown down on the counter. Bobbie seized it with a cry of delight, and the next moment had vanished. Bobbie flew round the corner and up his own stair ; but a start of alarm ran through him when he saw that the key of the door was not on the nail, but in the lock. The door unlocked, he walked in, wondering what had brought

his father back and taken him out again. He went straight to the mantelpiece and took down the stucco ornament ; and then a cry of agony burst from his lips. The letter was gone !

"He has been back, and taken it away with him—perhaps burnt it," were his words, as he sank to the floor. "Oh, God ! help me, a poor boy."

For a moment or two—it could not have been longer, though it appeared an age to him—he lay crouching in a heap on the floor—paralysed, stunned, almost senseless. Then a new hope flashed into his mind, and called back the strength of wild excitement.

"P'r'aps it's not too late yet ; p'r'aps I may find him at the public-house and get the letter from him."

The thought was a mere despairing clutch at a straw, but he acted on it at once. Down the stair he flew, along the street, and through the pend—he knew the way so well—and walked straight to a little box at the back of the shop. One man was in it in the scarlet coat of a postman, but he lay forward on his extended arms across the table in a heavy slumber. Bobbie tried to shake him into sensibility.

"Father ! get up—wake up !" he cried. "It's me—Bobbie—and I want something. Oh, for my sake rouse yourself !"

A sleepy growl and a rough push were the only answer he could extract ; and then, with a change in position, his father began to snore.

"Oh ! whatever will I do ? what will I do ?" cried the boy, shaking with excitement, and beginning to cry. "I must get the letter ; I wonder if he has it about him ? I could look if he would lie still ; but if he was to wake he would knock me down. He did it once before."

He stooped over the senseless man, and then cautiously passed his hand over the breast of Holman's coat, outside where the pocket lay. No crackling sound rewarded the search—the letter was not there. As cautiously he got round to the other side of the table and tried the coat-tails. A crackle there—a letter unmistakably ! Holman grunted and moved slightly, and the boy shrank down, trembling and breathless, till he had again settled into slumber. Then he inserted his hand and drew out the crushed letter in the blue envelope. Bobbie was becoming an expert thief now. Scarcely daring to breathe or look at his prize, beyond the first glance of recognition, Bobbie slipped round the table on tip-toe, left the box, and regained the street.

As soon as he was in the shade of the pend he drew out the sovereign, and with a shaking hand inserted it underneath the flap of the envelope, and then tried to smooth out the innumerable creases in the envelope.

But they would not smooth out, and his clumsy hands were likely only to make matters worse by staining the envelope. Then he thought of another expedient. Round he went to another shop, where a very rosy-faced woman was busy with a mangle. She smiled a welcome, and he passed on to the kitchen behind unquestioned. There was a great fire, a screen of newly-ironed things, and, what was far more attractive to him, there were two or three smoothing-irons at the fire. He took one up, smoothed out the letter on a wooden chair, put back the iron, and hurried out.

"What! are you away already?" cried the woman.

"Yes; I was only using one of your irons. Good-bye."

"Good-bye!" echoed the woman, as he disappeared. "What a queer laddie that is! Good-bye! a body wad think he was gaun away on a long journey."

A long journey? Well, perhaps he was. Perhaps he had an instinctive feeling of the kind himself. I know the woman afterwards recalled the words herself, and wondered to find them prophetic.

And now Bobbie seemed to have a clear field before him. He had mastered every difficulty—with a terrible strain of excitement, and at a dreadful cost, it is true; but still he had done it—and the letter was now smooth and apparently untampered with in his pocket, the address printed on his mind, and the street and stair only a few yards off. Yet even at this, the last moment, it seemed as if he were only to accomplish the task with a fight. As he passed along Richmond Street, he got a quick glimpse of the man whose watch he had stolen! A glimpse—nothing more; for he was through the close towards Arthur Street like the wind. Down—down! The stair at last! Up he mounted, found the door, rang the bell, and the letter was delivered! But now he felt at what a cost the whole had been accomplished. A growling rush below, the shouting of angry voices, and the tramping of quick heavy feet, came upon his ears with a startling shock. He was a thief, a wretch, a criminal. There was a hunt, and he was the hunted! I don't know why he rushed out of the stair-mouth and ran. Certainly he had no wish to escape, now that his father was safe. I rather think fear, or temporary madness, had got into

his head. But run he did—quick, swift—up the street, and there was a great shout and rush after him.

“There he is! there he is! Stop thief! stop thief!”

How the cry swelled out! Policemen appeared and ran—shopmen, labourers, boys—even women!

“Stop him! Stop thief! Ha! he can’t cross there! Good! there’s two cabs flying down Adam Street, right across his path. Give in now; you’re caught!”

But no, he wasn’t caught. He rushed on—blinded, maddened.

Ah! Oh God, he’s down! The wheels are over him!

“The blood!—oh-h-h!” A wild scream of horror, cabmen springing down and getting something out from among the wheels, windows flying up, and a great crowd instantly swarming up on every side.

“Gather him up—hold him gently—cover him over—poor boy!”

Ay, gather him up!—poor drooping figure—brave little martyr—and run—straight for the Infirmary, shouting as you run; for if you do not, the life may be out of him before you get there!

“How did it happen? Is he much hurt? What’s the matter? Oh, it’s only a thief that was trying to get off, and has got run over with a cab.”

Only a thief—poor wee Bobbie Holman!

I caught the crowd as it swarmed past the College, where women ran into shops or stairs, or hid their faces in their hands, not to see it as it passed; and hearing the running questions and answers, and being on the hunt for the thief of a watch, I followed the crowd into the building.

But Bobbie’s wounds could not be dressed, for they were nearly all internal; and it was long ere he opened his eyes; but then, though half-choked with blood, he seemed to suffer no pain, and whispered one word.

“Father!”

“He wants his father. Has he come yet?”

Bobbie had been recognised, and a man had gone to fetch his father; and he would have got him at once had his father been at home. But he was not: he was in the public-house asleep. He was found there some time after; and if ever there was a fearful awakening, it was that of Holman.

“Your boy, wee Bobbie, run over with a cab—dying!” were the words the man shouted in his ear; and then he awoke, and

ran, with whitened, ashy face, straight for the Infirmary, wringing his hands and moaning, with a terrible, tearless face.

But the height of his grief was to come. Bobbie was now delirious, and his first words rooted his father to the spot.

"A sovereign!—only one sovereign!" he moaned, struggling faintly with the nurse who held him. "Oh, auntie! it's to save my father!—it's to save my father! I will get it! I'm a thief—but he is saved! I must run! Let me go, I say—I must run!"

Holman uttered one shriek of agony, and sank, shivering, on his knees beside the bed.

"But I must get the letter," continued the wee senseless sufferer. "Perhaps he has it in his pocket—I'm glad it's not torn—I must smooth it out, or they'll find out all about it. Good-bye—good-bye. When she sees me again she won't look at me. I'm a thief—I must run—oh, let me run!"

The pawnbroker came and identified him at a glance, but he did not go away. The tears gathered thick in his eyes, and he sat down and took one of the white little hands in his own.

"Poor wee Bobbie!" he ejaculated. "I wonder why he turned a thief?"

"He did it for me!" groaned Holman, from the other side of the bed. "I have killed the boy."

Bobbie's struggles gradually got fainter, and his murmuring sank into whispers.

"Poor wee fellow! he's going fast," whispered the nurse; and, hardened though she was to such scenes, I saw the tears creep into her eyes. "I'm sure he doesn't look guilty now; he's like a little angel, poor wee man;" and her fingers travelled over his forehead and hair with a soft, motherly touch.

By and by Bobbie's eyes opened. He could not move, and for some moments did not speak; but his eyes wandered hungrily over the weeping faces surrounding the bed till they rested on the crouching figure at his side. Then he smiled—a bright, sweet smile it was, and so peaceful, though weary and flitting!

"Father! oh, father!"

"Here, Bobbie, speak again, poor wee sonny!"

"I did it—I saved you," came out in a faint whisper. "I turned thief—stoop lower—lower—but the letter went home all right. Oh, God! forgive my sins, for Jesus' sake."

The last words came out with a great effort, but more distinct and clear than any he had spoken; but with that effort he fell

back, and the nurse got between him and his distracted father. The little criminal was gone.

Yes, gone—gone to his account—gone to be judged where there is mercy as well as justice. Let him be veiled gently from your sight, dear reader ; think of him as poor wee Bobbie, the little thief, but the little martyr ; but do not judge him, or if you do, let it be not harshly, but as you yourself hope to be judged.

Holman went to Canada West shortly after ; but from a letter I have since received from him, I know that the night of Bobbie's death was also the night of his own **last drinking** bout.

BESSIE, THE ORANGE GIRL.

BESSIE, the orange-girl, stood near the foot of the North Bridge, close to the street lamp that had shown off her oranges since she took up her stand there at six o'clock the night before. Bessie was very tired, for it was now New-Year's morning, and the flaring lamps and candles at the orange barrows were beginning to pale in the grey dawn, and even Bessie's own light was threatened by the lamp-lighter who was steadily advancing towards her, shutting off the lights as he came. But though she was very tired, and had more than once during the night emptied her basket and gone up to their garret on the Terrace to have it re-filled, Bessie had no idea of going home to rest. Oh, no ! there was too much weight on her young shoulders to allow her even to think of such a thing—her work, indeed, was only begun. There were certain arrears of rent to be made up ; there was her mother, Mrs Hume, anything but strong, to be thought of ; and there was Snowdrop, her sister, just better of a fever, and getting rapidly strong, but needing a vast deal more nourishment and support than they had hitherto been able to afford. All these depended on Bessie's two or three boxes of oranges being rapidly sold, and to accomplish that she must stand there on the street seeing hundreds of happy, jolly, and smiling faces hurry past her, but feeling such a weight of care on her own heart that she often wondered that she herself could actually smile too.

"I'll never feel wearied when it's all for mother and Snow-drop," she said, bravely, to herself, changing her heavy basket to the other arm, and trying a short walk to take the stiffness out of her limbs : "I'm determined on that, so there's an end of it. I can stand here all day and all night again, and feel fresher at the end than twenty larks put together, when I only think it's for them. How thankful I am that I'm strong and able to work for them ! Oranges, sir ? beautiful Seville oranges ? Yes, sir, only a penny each, and you can pick the biggest ones for yourself ;" and then a happy-looking father, who had been at

a party, and wanted to take something home with him, put some pennies in her hand, with a kind smile for every penny, which to poor Bessie almost made it count two.

"Yes, that's a nice man," said Bessie to herself, looking after the man as he walked off with her oranges bulging out his pockets, and his smiles bulging out her heart; "I hope he'll have a happy New-Year, and that God will bless all his family, and make them kind to him when he gets old. It's nice to have some one to work for and be kind to. How unhappy people must be who have just to crawl along thinking of nothing but themselves! Oranges! fine Seville oranges!" and this time a bridal party—bride, bridegroom, best maid and man, and some of their guests, all looking very draggled and weary as they trooped along towards the railway stair—had their steps arrested by the cry, and in a twinkling two dozen oranges had vanished among their pockets.

"Certainly, if I go on in this way," said Bessie, with her heart much fuller than the pockets of the retreating party, "I'll soon be completely sold out, and have to go back to the wholesale dealer for a box or two more. I wonder how it is that everybody comes to me for oranges, and how they all smile on me so kindly, and say that they're afraid the basket is too heavy for me, and make that an excuse for buying more! If they only knew how Snowdrop's eyes will dance and sparkle when I take home the money and the empty basket, and how mother will take me in her arms and kiss me, and say that God has made me a good daughter to her, why, it would warm their hearts for the whole day—or the whole year, for that part—and make them think they had never eaten such sweet oranges in their whole lives. And then drunken men never interfere with me, or get me into trouble in any way; and the policeman, instead of making me move on, why! he actually stopped and smiled at me, and told me not to run away, and then bought two oranges! And then—oranges, sir—fine Seville oranges, —I'll pick you beauties for a penny each." And now a blind man, with a fiddle under his arm, who had been up all night, and was perhaps nearly as wearied as Bessie herself, was arrested by her cry. He, too, had his little fireside to cheer, and knew that there would a crowd of tiny hands round his pockets when he brought home his night's earnings; and seeing that he was to be his own "first-foot," it would never do to enter the house empty-handed, or pocketed either; so he paused and heard her describe the beauty of the golden fruit

which he could never see, and finally let her pick some big ones out for him in exchange for one of his bright sixpences. Then he said—"Lord ! lassie, ye're as guid as a pair o' een to me ; I'm sure your mother must be proud o' ye ;" and then he smiled in reply to her good wishes, and his sightless orbs fairly sparkled, as if reflecting the light from Bessie's eyes ; and I'm pretty sure some of the sunshine got into his heart, and went with him to brighten his own home.

"Poor man ! how kindly he speaks of his bairns !" reflected Bessie, as she watched his retreating form. "It must be an awful thing to lose one's sight ! How thankful I am that I have mine, and that I can see Snowdrop, and watch mother's eyes when they are beaming kindly and softly on us both ! Oh, it's grand ! And after all, every one must work hard in some way if they do their duty to the world ; so I can never repine. And, perhaps, some day, after we've got out of all these difficulties, my poor sailor brother, Andrew, will turn up and find us out, and be a strong help and support to mother in her old age. Poor fellow ! I'm afraid he's dead. If he had only been content to be a sailor, and not have left it to go away into that terrible country they call Mexico in search of a fortune—oranges !—sweet Seville oranges ! Oh, it's only you, Jenny ! A happy New-Year to you !" she added, recognising a slim girl, a neighbour of her own, hurrying past. "And what brings you out so early on this bitter cold morning ?"

"It's our Willie !" was the hurried reply. "Poor wee fellow, he's so bad—it's the same fever that poor Snowdrop had ; and he's taken the notion of—of—" and the girl faltered as her eyes rested longingly on the beautiful oranges in Bessie's basket. But she need not have hesitated, for the words were instantly taken out of her mouth by Bessie with a glad eagerness that could never have been assumed.

"He has taken a notion of an orange," she cried, instantly plunging her hand into her basket ; "and he shall have it too—the best in my basket ; and all for nothing. There now, don't say a word, for I insist on it—it's my New-Year's present to Willie, and p'r'aps they'll do him more good than all the doctor's stuffs put together. There, now"—and she put two or three of the biggest in the girl's hand—"away you go, as fast as you like, for he'll be waiting on them."

Jenny grasped Bessie's hand very tight and close, and tried to take the oranges in her arms, though, like the tears in her eyes, they would insist on coming popping out again just where

they were not wanted ; and then she was taken by the shoulders by the kind-hearted girl and shoved away about her business, with the words—

“ There—do you think I don’t know how our Snowdrop felt when she was bad ? Away you go and tell Willie I’ll come in to see him and hold his head as soon as I get the press of the New-Year over.”

“ Poor Willie ! ” reflected Bessie, as the girl ran joyfully away, “ how he must suffer, lying ill at such a happy, jolly time ! How happy one can make themselves by just giving away an orange ! I actually believe that’s one of the things that very few people know about. Everything is going to be so bright with me, that p’r’aps I’ll have a happy New-Year myself after all ! ”

So reasoned Bessie ; but, bright as was the halo with which she tried to surround her cold, hunger, and toil, at that very moment the ominous cloud that was to overshadow all was beginning to gather. To make this perfectly clear to the reader—or, at least, clearer than it afterwards was to me—I must follow the steps of the girl she had befriended.

Just as Jenny reached the corner of the old Theatre-Royal, and was about to press her way across towards the Terrace in Leith Street, her attention was attracted by some very suspicious movements on the part of a kind of nondescript, a dealer in fancy pipes, called Hairy Jenkins, who carried his painted wares in a little blacking-box slung across his breast. The reputation of this lad was “ fishy ; ” that is, he was not actually known to be a thief, but was so far suspected as to be shunned by such as Bessie and Jenny, and others of the more industrious poor. Round his little blacking-box at the moment were gathered a few loungers from the ever-increasing stream of passengers, attracted, doubtless, by his glib tongue ; and among these Jenny noticed particularly a fine, bronzed-looking sailor, who was laughingly tendering Hairy a half-sovereign out of a well-filled cowskin purse, with a strong brass clasp. But Hairy had no change, or pretended to have none ; and the purse of the young sailor was carelessly thrust into the side-pocket of his jacket, while he diligently searched the pockets of his trousers for sufficient to purchase the “ genuine meer-schaum ” held up by Hairy Jenkins. By the hitching and pressing of the crowd, the sailor was pressed hard against Hairy’s blacking-box ; and it was exactly at that moment that Jenny’s eye happened to light on Hairy’s right arm, which she saw, or

fancied that she saw, travel stealthily under the box in the direction of the sailor's side-pocket. In another instant the arm came back again, but with it came a flash, as if the hand had held something shiny—something resembling the brass clasp on the sailor's purse. The whole was the work of a moment; and while Jenny debated with herself whether she should risk interfering, her thoughts and surmises were suddenly cut short by a policeman shoving her rudely off the pavement, and commanding her to "move on." The oranges in her arms had misled him into thinking that she stood there offering them for sale; and knowing remonstrance to be useless, Jenny ran on her way, having all thoughts of the sailor and Hairy Jenkins suddenly driven out of her head.

Meanwhile the sailor, having paid for the pipe out of a handful of change which he took from his trousers-pocket, turned away, and then Hairy Jenkins, blacking-box and all, moved rather hastily from the spot, turning up the Bridge towards Bessie's stand, and keeping on the pavement as if he had now made enough for the day, and intended retiring into obscurity. Bessie noticed the face; but rather disliking the lad than otherwise, she was allowing him to pass with a slight nod of recognition, when a great shout and commotion at the foot of the Bridge at once attracted all eyes. Hairy Jenkins among the rest paused, and perking his head cautiously out from the stream of passengers, looked back and saw a crowd hastily gathering round a sailor, who was volubly declaiming to a policeman, and looking searchingly round in every direction. Hairy paled slightly, and looked hurriedly about him as if about to throw away something he held in his hand, and then a thought seemed to strike him as his eye rested on Bessie's basket of oranges.

"Come here, Bessie," he called from the centre of the pavement, "I want an orange—a big one; but you must let me pick it myself from the very bottom of your basket."

Bessie noticed that he looked pale and flurried, and wondered at his imperative haste, but obeyed with a smile, and held forth her basket without suspicion. Hairy instantly plunged his right hand deep down—up to the elbow—among the oranges, and as swiftly brought it out again—empty.

"I can't feel any big ones," he hurriedly observed, with a fearful glance down the street at the gathering crowd. "I'll just take one of these on the top;" and, with a snatch, he had one in his hand, threw down a penny, and walked off rapidly.

But it happened that, further up, opposite the stair leading down to Canal Street, there was a block of passengers on the pavement, and in an unguarded moment Hairy left the shelter and stepped on to the causeway. The step was a luckless one, for the instant he appeared there was a shout down at the corner, a great rush, and a cry of "Stop, thief!" which he heard coming straight towards him, though he had not courage to look round. On came the crowd, on came the swelling cry, and on came the running policeman and sailor, and in an instant a dozen hands were grasping at Hairy's head, collar, hair, and arms, while the like number of legs and feet kept trampling and kicking at him, and the excited crowd called upon him to "give up the sailor's purse, or they would throw him over the Bridge—pipes, blacking-box, and all."

Never was there a picture of more virtuous indignation or spotless innocence than that seen in the face of Hairy Jenkins as he struggled among his captors, and boldly faced the handsome bronzed face of the sailor.

"Hold on there; just keep your feet to yourselves; enough's as good's a feast," he said, coolly addressing the excited crowd. "Now, you—what purse d'ye mean? I never saw ye with a purse; ye paid me out of yer pocket."

"I mean the cowskin purse that I took the half-sovereign from, which you wouldn't change," was the quick reply. "I didn't think of it at the time, but now I coud swear your hand came under that infernal blacking-box and picked my pocket."

"Well, swear away, if that'll do ye any good. It won't make me a prig, will it?" and the face of Hairy Jenkins looked more and more innocent.

"Come away to the Office; that's the best way to settle it," said the officer. "It won't do to stand here blocking the way."

"But then I might be wrong," said the sailor, with a shade of doubt crossing his honest face. "I was a fool to carry so much rhino aboard."

"Of course you're wrong," chimed in Hairy Jenkins—"completely sold; an' I means to take heavy damages of yer for falsely chargin' me wi' such a hact. Let go there; don't ye see the gen'leman's come to his senses? P'raps I might be indooed to forgive him, seein' that it's Noo'-Ear-time."

"Don't let him off—search his pockets!" cried some of the crowd.

"That's not lawful," interposed the policeman, with dignity; "he must come to the Office first."

"Oh, lawful! be hanged," cried the sailor. "I've come from a land where there's no such word—free-and-easy Mexico, where every man is a law to himself. Come on, lads! He's robbed me of every stiver that I meant for my poor mother and sisters. Turn out his pockets!"

A New-Year's crowd is remarkably free from qualms of any kind, and the wish was no sooner expressed than, with swift hands and joyful alacrity, it was obeyed—the policeman vainly warning them that they were laying themselves open to an action for heavy damages. But though every rag and pocket of Hairy Jenkins' attire was ransacked and turned outside in, and the contents of the blacking-box were pitched out on the well-trodden snow—many of the painted pipes coming to grief on the way—not a trace of the cowskin purse or its valuable contents was to be found. The coolness and the audacity of the accused, as he nimbly assisted them to search his pockets, and politely requested them to break a few more pipes, or to more completely smash up his "warehouse"—the blacking-box—might have staggered those with wiser heads and keener instincts. The result was that Hairy Jenkins was released, the crowd began to melt away, and the sailor reluctantly prepared to follow their example, while Hairy volubly threatened him and his assistants with the terrors of the law. But the threats fell on dull and dispirited senses, and the sailor turned away with something like tears in his eyes, paying no heed to the injunction of the policeman to report the robbery at the Central Office. At this moment, however, he became conscious of being addressed in soft, winning tones by a young girl; and, looking up for the first time, saw the bright face of Bessie, the orange girl.

"Oranges, sir! fine Seville oranges! I'd pick the biggest ones to you for a penny each," she said, addressing him even more kindly than was her custom, as she noted his dress and thought of her own big brother wandering away in unknown lands and dangers. "Won't you buy one for your sweetheart, or your mother, or your sister, if you have one?"

The sailor had paused, and was gazing fixedly into the pale sweet face with a strange emotion thrilling him through and through. The face to him seemed the faint reflection of a far-off dream—something that he had fancied hung over him in the lonely watches on the ocean like the vision of a sisterly guardian angel. The voice of the girl roused him.

"Won't you buy one, sir?" and she tumbled over the

oranges to get the very biggest and finest. "Choose them for yourself, if you like."

"I will," heartily responded the sailor, finding his voice at last, and beginning in a mechanical way to fumble among the oranges, but still finding the chief attraction in Bessie's own face, "for I have a mother, though where she is, God only knows."

"Ah! but God will soon help you to find her out," cheerily returned Bessie, with one of her irresistible smiles, helping him to turn over the oranges in search of the fine ones. "I think God watches over mothers and sons more than over other folks—at least, I hope so;" and Bessie gave a faint sigh.

"And I have two little sisters too," continued the sailor unreservedly, brightening unconsciously under Bessie's smiles. "And one of them, if she were alive, I daresay would be nearly as big as you. I'm on my way to them now, though I shouldn't wonder but they have forgotten all about me by this time. I know I wouldn't know them, not though they were clapped down right before me."

"Forget about you!" answered Bessie, with a wide opening of her eyes. "Not they. They will think of you every day, and pray for you every night. I know they will; because—because—I've seen a case something like it;" and in her confusion at having been so unreserved with a stranger, Bessie blushed deeply.

"Good-bye, then, and a happy New-Year to you;" and the sailor was turning away with his purchases when Bessie cheerfully rejoined—

"Take it with you! But stay: take one into the bargain—one for your mother;" and she held out her whole basket to choose from.

Was it an unlucky or a lucky offer? I am not quite sure; but the reader shall presently judge.

The sailor laughingly picked an orange; but all at once Bessie saw the smile die on his lips, and a strange pallor spread over his cheeks, as he stared in a kind of fascination at something glittering in the bottom of her basket. Bessie, after the first start, instinctively followed the direction of his gaze, and then saw him, with a shaking hand, draw from among her oranges a cowskin purse with a bright brass glasp!

The rest was like a wild dream to the poor orange-girl. She heard the sailor's shout of surprise as he triumphantly raised the purse above his head; she listened in a dumfounded way

to the hoarse reproaches that he heaped on her head ; she heard the word "Thief !" ringing in her ears, and a surging crowd gathering and muttering on every side ; while a policeman appeared as if by magic, snatched the basket of oranges from her hand, and proceeded to tug her along towards the Central Office.

"Stop! stop! I am innocent! I never saw the purse before!" she wildly screamed, at last finding her breath and voice. "Oh! what will my poor mother do now?"

The wild cry and the piteous look of distraction went home to the heart of the sailor, and he paused and whispered a moment with the policeman ; but the man was immovable.

"No ; I've got the case, and the thief too," he firmly answered, "and it must go to the Office."

"Wot's up? Wot's the matter?" Bessie heard a voice inquire, and then she saw the familiar form of Hairy Jenkins elbowing into the centre. "Wot, Bessie, have they nabbed you?"

"Yes, we've got her and the purse too," dryly observed the policeman. "You weren't palming together, were you?"

"On my honour, no!" answered Hairy, with the most innocent look in the world. "So, Bessie, that's wot ye meant by sayin' to me ye had made as much this mornin' as would keep ye the whole 'ear? Oh, you audacious thief!" and he raised his hands and shook his head like a very grandfather.

"What! Did she say that?" quickly inquired the policeman."

"Certainly she did ; I'll swear to that if ye want my hevidence," responded Hairy, with the utmost readiness.

"We may want it, and we may not," dryly returned the policeman. "It's not worth much at the best."

"Oh! ain't it though? I must report you," sternly returned Hairy. "You don't mind yer dooty enough, and want taking down. Hoblige me with yer number?"

The policeman replied with a vigorous kick at the rags forming the tail of Hairy's jacket ; and then, as the pipeseller was beating a retreat, poor Bessie found her voice—

"Don't let him off—please, don't. He has told a great many lies about me, and I feel sure that he must have had something to do with the stealing of the purse, and with putting it in my basket."

The policeman looked doubtful, the sailor seemed decidedly

in favour of acting upon Bessie's suggestion, but Hairy paused in his retreat, and favoured the group with a look of injured innocence that might have melted a heart of stone.

"Wot! am I to be hinsulted as well as injured!" he pathetically exclaimed; "all my pipes broken, my warehouse cracked, and, after all, my honour doubted? Wot's this blessed vorld a-comin' to? Take her away, take her away; she's a desp'rate bad 'un. She wants three months of skilly and the everlasting staircase to take the wickedness out of her;" and with this parting injunction Hairy retired, amid the hisses and hoots of the crowd, with as much dignity as his rags would permit.

"I am innocent—God above knows I am innocent!" sobbed Bessie, as she was led away up the Bridge, with the policeman carrying her basket, and the sailor walking rather uneasily at her side. "Oh! what will become of them? and who will help me now?"

"I will," suddenly blurted out the sailor. "P'raps I'm a great fool, but blow me if I don't believe you're as innocent as myself! There now, I've got it out; and look here, guv'nor, if you just let her off, and say no more about it, I don't mind standing you a shiner to drink my health."

The policeman smiled pityingly, and trudged steadily on, keeping a sharp eye both on prisoner and on prosecutor.

"It's no use, my lass; but keep up your heart," said the sailor, kindly addressing Bessie, "I'll get you off, or my name isn't Andrew."

"Oh, bless you! How glad my mother will be!" impulsively returned Bessie, seizing his brown hand and fervently kissing it, with the light of hope beaming through her tears. "She would take you in her arms, and pray for you night and day, for it's on me they both depend; and if I were put in prison they might starve."

"There, there—don't do that, and don't look so pitiful," chokingly ejaculated the sailor. "You'll set me off a-crying like a babby if you go on so;" and he made a hasty poke at one of his eyes with a brown knuckle, as if actually crying then.

The policeman stared at the two, and tried to look terribly stern, and say something about people wishing to countenance and encourage crime; but even his voice was husky, as if perhaps he himself had some one at home who would have felt great distress if he got into trouble; so the words got leave

to die away in a mumble. They reached the Office, and I happened to be in the room at the time, assisting to take down the numerous cases as they arrived, for any day of great pleasure to the public is quite the reverse to us. I listened patiently to the case as it was stated by the policeman ; but with the first glance at Bessie's eager pale face, I said to myself, "That girl is innocent ;" and it was quite plain to me before they had finished that both the policeman and the sailor were inclined to take the same merciful view of the case. But that did not bring any solution of the mystery, till a word of Bessie's gave me the first clue.

"I am innocent ; I can put my two hands on the Bible and swear before God that I never saw or knew anything of the purse till this kind sailor found it in my basket. I don't know how it could have got there, unless Hairy Jenkins had put it in when he was hunting in my basket for a big orange," and she brightened a little through her tears as she added, "I forgot about that till now."

"Was that after the sailor had lost his purse ?" I quickly inquired.

"Yes, I think so ; it was just when the noise began at the foot of the Bridge about a sailor having had his pocket picked."

"Have you any witnesses—I mean, can you refer to any one who saw him near your basket ?"

"Not one. Many may have seen him, but not one that I know."

"Ah ! that's a pity. I don't see that we can avoid locking you up. But don't cry ; if you are innocent, as I myself am inclined to believe, the truth will soon come out. The worst of it is, that we are so busy to-day that the case may have to rest a little ; but if I can find a moment at all, I will help you. As for Hairy Jenkins, I can get him at any moment, and if everything else fails, I can pick him up, and try to turn him inside out."

It was now my turn to receive thanks, which I did from both the prisoner and the reluctant accuser ; and after bidding each other a very friendly farewell, the two parted, and Bessie was locked up.

But the sailor was not long gone. In less than three hours he returned, completely fagged, careworn, and down-hearted, and stated that he wished the services of a skilful detective. For want of a better he was introduced to me a second time, and then he

stated his case. It appeared that he had been absent from Scotland for eight or nine years, and for a great part of that time had held no written communication with his friends; and now, upon going to the old home, he had found strangers in the place, who had never as much as heard of his mother and sisters. From another source he had also learned that, from comparative comfort, his relatives had sunk into deep poverty; and now he was willing to pay any amount of money for assistance to ferret them out.

I felt for the poor fellow, sitting there with his honest face clouded with concern and his eyes filled with tears, as he piteously implored me to help him; and, busy as I was, I thought I might stretch a point and give him an hour of my own time.

Buccleuch Street had been the locality of his home, and thither we directed our steps, in hope of coming on some trace of his missing friends. It was a wearisome task, even for me; but at last I came upon a little dairy of long standing, and finding an old woman with sharp intelligent eyes behind the counter, I addressed myself to her with some hope of success.

"Ye'll no mind o' a Mrs Hume that stayed in No.—a long time?" I inquiringly remarked, in my broadest Scotch. "She cam' doon in the warld a year or twa syne, and left the place."

"Mrs Hume?" thoughtfully echoed the old woman; "that wad be a widow body wi' twa bairns—lassies, I think?"

"The very same. Ye'll no ken where they went?"

"Deed, I dinna; but maybe Peggy 'ill mir.3—that's the lassie that tak's oot the milk—she kens a'thing. Peggy! dae ye ken what's come o' the Humes that used to bide in Number—?"

A stout young girl appeared from the back and answered—"I'm no very sure. I heard they were beggars on the street, or cadgers, or something."

The sailor at my side whitened to the roots of the hair, and I could see his fists spasmodically clenched on the smooth counter.

"Ye'll no hae an idea where they stay?" I asked, as calmly as my own interest and excitement would allow.

"Yes; I think it's some way owre at the Terrace, in Leith Street."

That was enough for us; and, with a rather hurried "Good-

bye," and thanks for the information, we were out of the shop and striding across the Bridges to Leith Street Terrace. We had a great deal of searching even to find the stair; but at last we came upon a young girl nursing a sick child, who stated that she not only knew the Humes, but would take us to their very room. This girl—who was no other than Jenny, whose acquaintance the reader has already made—stared with widely-opened eyes on the bronzed face and open features of the sailor, and at last eagerly exclaimed—

"You are not—not Bessie's brother, the sailor, that went away long, long ago, and that she and I always pray for at night when there's a storm in the air?"

"Yes, I am—I'm her brother Andrew, come home at last to make her, and her mother, and Snowdrop, happy and comfortable."

Not half of this was heard, for Jenny gave a whoop of joy that might have been heard away out at Powburn, and instantly skipped nearly as high as the ceiling.

"I'm mad! I'm mad! don't mind me!" cried the impulsive, good-hearted girl. "Oh! won't your mother be glad!—and Snowdrop—why, it'll kill them with joy!—and Bessie when she comes home! Oh! what a time there'll be of it! It will be a happy New-Year, and no mistake! Come away—come away—for I'm dying to see you all together. Quick! quick!" and she was flying out of the room and along the dark passage when I interposed.

"Stay," I said; "you are quite right in saying the joy might kill them. They must be prepared in some way for the shock—gently, you know."

"Yes, yes," eagerly returned the girl. "I'm the one to do that, I'm so firm," she added, shaking all over; "and I'll manage it fine if I can only put on a long face and look miserable, so that she sha'n't read it in my eyes;" and she made a hideous contortion to disguise the smiling radiance beaming from her whole face. "Yes, yes, come away! I'll go in first, and give you the signal when it's all ready. I'll cough, or laugh, or cry, or something. It'll be all right, come away!" and she flew along the passage, tugged open a door without knocking, and burst in upon the astonished mother and daughter.

"Oh, Mrs Hume!" she cried; and then she took the delicate mother impulsively round the neck and had a burst of crying and laughing. "Only guess who's come?—you're not to faint,—it's your brave sailor son Andrew!" And then

seeing how completely she had managed the thing, we both rushed in, and the sailor caught his mother in his arms and strained her half-fainting form to his breast; after which he himself was caught round the neck by the pale slip of a girl called Snowdrop, and hugged and cried over; and then Jenny gave another whoop of joy, which this time might have been heard at Portobello, and skipped round the locked group like one fairly demented.

But by and by, just as I was thinking of leaving, there was a pause in the joyful rush of words, and the sailor asked—

“But where is little Bess? and what on earth are you doing with such a pile of orange-boxes in the house? One would think you kept a fruit shop.”

“Bessie? Bessie is out—out at her work,” hesitatingly returned the mother, with a painful flush. “But we will send for her. Jenny will go and—”

“Stop—for Heaven’s sake, stop!” It was I who shouted out the words as the girl was flying off; and my excitement must have astonished the whole group, for they stared at me with open mouths. “Your name is Hume: have you a girl called Bessie on the street selling oranges?”

The mother paled, and her eye fell under the quick glance of the sailor.

“It is true—she would do it,” was her broken reply. “It was to keep our name clear, and help us to clear off some debt which has arisen through Snowdrop’s illness and my own.”

The mother was prepared for agitation on the part of her son, but for nothing like the terrible excitement which her simple words seemed to create. He staggered to his feet with a shout of agony, and a wild clench of his hands at his forehead. The same thought that had flashed across my mind had dawned upon his own.

“My sister!—it was my sister!” he gasped. “I have ruined her!”

“What does it mean?” cried the three in a breath.

“It means,” I answered, “that an orange-girl, calling herself Bessie Hume, has been taken up on a charge of picking your son’s pocket of a cowskin purse, or of obtaining it by some unlawful means.”

“Then it’s a base lie!” cried Jenny, with a hot flush on her cheeks. “I remember it all now—how Andrew’s face seemed so familiar to me. I saw him this morning standing buying a pipe from Hairy Jenkins; and what’s more, I believe I saw

Hairy picking his pocket from under the blacking-box on his breast ! There now : if there's a purse been stolen, you'll find it on Hairy Jenkins ! Bessie is as innocent as a lamb."

Of course this hurried statement gave quite a new turn to affairs, and after carefully examining the girl I took my leave, and thought myself fully justified in picking up Hairy Jenkins on my way to the Office. Other stray scraps of evidence, all tending in the same direction, came in by degrees ; and in the afternoon Bessie was set at liberty, while Hairy Jenkins, taking my advice, made a clean breast of all—chiefly, I believe, with a view to saving himself when brought up for trial.

But what a night they had of it in that garret on the Terrace ! They would have me down, and I did manage to spare an hour for the purpose, and had my health drunk with such fervour that it is quite a wonder I have ever been ill since. As for presents, they would have given me anything ; and oranges—why, they stuffed my pockets so that they were in holes for weeks after—for you know they were dead stock now, as Bessie was never to go on the streets to sell oranges again.

Five years later I was at a marriage where Bessie made a very pretty bridesmaid to as pretty a bride. That bride was Jenny ; and the hand in which she placed hers so lovingly and confidingly when she had said " Yes " to the minister's question, was the tar-stained but honest hand of Andrew Hume.

GARROTED TO ORDER.

A WILD east wind was sweeping up the face of the Calton Hill, carrying with it a thick curtain of white snow to join the deeper coating already covering the slope, and clearing the lonely spot of straggling and miserable waifs more effectually than could have done a whole score of vigilant policemen. The time was nearly eleven o'clock at night, late in the month of January; yet cold and stormy, and threatening though it was, there was one solitary figure crouching and cowering in at the west side of the National Monument. Probably, with the exception of the policeman on the beat, there was not another human being on the hill at the moment. Yet this one was no shivering waif or houseless wanderer—no semblance of a woman with forsaken friends, home, and heaven behind her, and before a yawning gulf of eternal blackness which she shuddered to face. It was a man—a gentleman, some would have said, judging by his dress—comfortably clothed, wrapped up to the ears, and stamping about in the driest and best double-soled boots, with little of his face visible but a pair of cunning eyes and the tip of a blotched and whisky-painted nose. Daniel M'Lure held a good position as cashier in an Edinburgh brewery—a post he had occupied for fourteen years without suspicion,—and might have risen to something better but for a secret passion for billiards and bad whisky. This was the millstone round his neck which got heavier every year—which forced him to make the most superhuman efforts to keep up an appearance of respectability and uprightness to the world, and, in spite of these efforts, seemed destined to land him in the mire. It was not easy to spend whole nights in a half-maddened state in billiard-rooms and such questionable resorts, then go home for an hour or two's rest, and then appear calm, honest, and well-doing at his post in the morning; and, like all the infatuated crowd racing after pleasure, he resolved that, if he could but once get his feet on firm ground, the whole round of dissipation should come to an end. The road to hell is said to be

paved with good intentions, and one of the most diligent causewaylayers on the line was Mr Daniel M'Lure. His latest "intention" was a peculiarly appropriate one, that, indeed, which had brought him to the desolate spot at such a strange hour. Every effort to get into the straight road had hitherto failed, and he had now struck on the old, old plan of trying to right himself by roguery. The peculiarity of this course is, that every one who adopts it imagines he has hit on something highly original and clever. He sees nothing of the thousands upon thousands whom the same will-o'-wisp has lighted to destruction. Success is pictured out before him, and the awful deep between completely hidden in flowers and sunshine.

"I think I have planned it out as well as it is possible to plan," he muttered to himself, with a satisfied chuckle, as he shook the snow from his shoulders and stamped over the crisp white ground. "And even if discovery came, why, I am not the robber; so who can blame me? I wish the two rascals would come, and not keep me waiting here till I'm frozen to death. They'll be sitting drinking, no doubt, or playing at dominoes, while I am shivering here in the cold. If I was behind them with a red hot poker they'd move a little faster, I'll warrant. Ah, here's somebody at last!" and he stopped in his walk to peer through the falling snow in the direction of the path leading up from opposite the entrance to the jail. "It's Billy Pagan at last, I believe, and the other will be the valued 'pal' he spoke of, whom he insisted on having engaged to assist."

The foremost figure, advancing cautiously through the driving snow towards the Monument, was disclosed as a man in shepherd-tartan trousers, rough jacket, and fur cap, with flaps over the ears—the veritable Billy Pagan alluded to—a kind of billiard-room loafer, who was ready for any quiet job that came in his way. The other was Alley Snaggs, a much more powerfully built ruffian, only much less loquacious with his tongue. The longest speeches he was ever known to make were, "That's right," and "So say I." Beyond that he spoke only with his fists, which were both cruel and strong.

"Good evenin', guv'nor," said Billy Pagan, after peering at the cashier's face, and making sure that he was speaking to the right man. "We're rayther late; but we was detained by a visit from the Dook o' Wellington and the Hempress o' Rooshia, ridin' in a golden carriage, with forty gemmen on horseback, and twenty—"

"Shut up, you cursed idiot!" angrily broke in M'Lure, whose toes and temper were both at zero. "You've kept me waiting to-night; but if you keep me on Friday, you may whistle for the money, for you'll never see it."

"Oh! never fear, we'll be there!" assuringly answered Billy. "This is only a meetin' for pleasure—the other'll be for business, and we never neglects that, especially when the lay is a good un—eh, Alley?"

"That's right—so say I," gruffly responded Mr Snaggs.

"Well, listen to me. I asked you to meet me here because we can talk without danger of any one overhearing," sharply pursued the cashier, leading the way round the Monument to the slope of the hill, whence they could see round on every side. "The fact is, I want money—"

"We all wants it," politely observed Billy Pagan, with a familiarity that rather grated on the ears of the cashier. "Don't we, Alley?"

"That's right," hoarsely answered Mr Snaggs.

"Well, though there's pounds upon pounds passing through my hands every week, I'm as poor as a church mouse—on the rocks positively; and in business everything is so sharply looked after—every item so nicely figured and balanced—that it is utterly impossible to appropriate as much as a penny without being detected."

"Awful; yer deserves to be pitied," sympathisingly remarked Mr Pagan.

"Well, of course, though I want some of the money, the mere wishing for it won't bring it into my hands," pursued M'Lure; "and as for stealing it, that's out of the question, as I am not a thief—"

"No; yer only wants to be one," obligingly interposed Mr Pagan, to which Mr Alley Snaggs added—"So say I."

"On Friday first I shall be out during the whole day collecting accounts in Leith and Leith Walk," continued M'Lure, with difficulty repressing his disgust at the familiarity of the two thieves. "I ought to get back to Edinburgh before four o'clock, in time to deposit the money safely in the bank; but I mean to contrive that it shall be nearly five before I get to Blenheim Place, when, of course, instead of walking up towards the bank, I shall cut across by Royal Terrace and Abbey Hill towards the office in the Brewery. Now, it is there your work must be done, for, in passing along the dark terrace, on the railed side, I want you to attack and rob me;" and, with a

knowing grin, he poked Billy Pagan in the side, as if he had just given utterance to a stroke of humour.

"Rob ye! Oh, we'll do that!" said the easy-minded Billy with great alacrity. "We're ready to begin now, for that matter. Suppose we gives ye one for yer nob and collars yer watch?" and Billy tapped suggestively at the neddy he carried up the back of his rough jacket, whereat Mr Alley Snaggs chuckled with a noise like a blowing whale, and emphatically added, "That's right; so say I."

"Oh, honour—honour—among thieves," remonstrated M'Lure, not feeling over confident of the good faith likely to be kept by the easy-minded pair he was about to employ.

"Ah! but ye ain't a thief; ye said so yerself," cunningly interposed Mr Pagan. "Hows'ever, if ye don't cut up an' play double wi' us, ye ain't got much to fear; if ye do, hoff course ye must take yer chance."

This was not very comforting to M'Lure, for to play double with all concerned was precisely what he had all along resolved upon doing; but he still thought that his superior cunning would be a match for their brute force, so he merely resumed, as pleasantly as possible—

"Now, about the terms. You have already agreed that it is to be ten pounds to each of you, for which you undertake to protect the money in your hide till I choose to claim it. It will be all stowed away in a canvas bag; and as a large proportion of it will probably be in silver and gold, you will have no difficulty in paying yourself out of that, and reserving the notes for me."

"Stop a bit; there's a little more to be said on that there point," remarked Billy Pagan, with uncommon seriousness. "How much money, on a rough calculation, do ye think ye'll be carryin'?"

"I cannot say, but expect it will not fall much short of a hundred pounds."

"Whew, crickey! and ye thought we'd take all that risk for a tenner?" cried Billy, with an aggrieved look. "No, no; that ain't the perfeSSIONal way o' doin' business. It must be share and share alike, seein' you don't run any risk, except perhaps a whoppin' about the head if ye resists werry hard. Say what it's to be—off or on?"

M'Lure did not answer readily, and Billy, mistaking his silence for hesitation, thought best to concede a point rather than lose the job.

"Say thirty pounds to each of us an' the rest to you, and it's a bargain," he temptingly pursued ; to which Mr Snaggs added an emphatic "That's right."

Now, as things were lying snugly planned in M'Lure's mind, it did not matter what sum he promised the thieves. He might as readily have promised them the whole of the money as a third each, his resolve being that only the kicks, if any, should fall to them as their share, and all the silver, gold, and notes come to him as his.

"If I agree too easily they may suspect the truth," was his cautious thought as he gazed meditatively on the two rascals before him ; and to show that they were not far behind him either in greed or cunning, I need only remark, that in ascending the slope Billy had said in confidence to his companion, "In course, Alley, if we gets the chance we does a bolt wif the whole o' the money, soon as ever we gets our forks on it ; but—he, he, he !—mum's the word, ye know."

"Thirty pounds is a deal of money," said the cashier, with pretended reluctance ; "besides, I could do the whole thing myself without any assistance if I had a mind."

"No, ye couldn't, for ye'd be sure to be suspected and nailed," acutely remarked Billy. "Ye wants us to take the suspicion off ye, and lead the beaks away the t'other road. An' mind, we may be caught and had up at the Polis Court, and get sixty days for nothing, when they find that you can't swear to us, and they ain't got evidence to convict us. Oh ! we must be paid for the risk—that's flat."

"All right, I agree," said M'Lure, with an inward chuckle ; "it shall be as you say—thirty pounds to each of you, if I carry over a hundred in all."

"Yes, and share alike if it's under," added Billy, with a keen look into the cashier's face. "Blow me !" he added to himself, "but I don't like him for givin' in so easy. Perhaps he means to play us a trick ; mebbe the whole job's a sell. We must watch him ; and if he tries it, why, we'll just about croak him, that's all."

"Then you understand what you're to do?" continued M'Lure. "You wait for me on Friday at the corner of Blenheim Place, follow me along the Terrace, knock me down—"

"Really," put in Billy, opening his eyes, "shall we crack yer skull in earnest?"

"Bah ! no more foolery," testily returned M'Lure. "No ; you're to knock me down merely for the look of the thing, and

in case any one might be looking on. Then you must pull me about in the dirt, tear the coat off my back, rip up my shirt front, and altogether give me the appearance of having made a most desperate resistance. This done, all you have to do is to put your hand in my breast-pocket while I pretend to be insensible, pull out the canvas bag full of money, and be off as quick as you like."

"Like the wind!" said Billy, with a twinkle in his small eyes. "Oh! the running's easy, and the collarin' of the money as simple as pocketin' a ball; but wouldn't ye like us to just make a good job on it by givin' ye a grip or two about the neck? 'Twould look more artistic like; and, hang it! I don't like to earn my money for nothing."

"Don't try it!" harshly growled M'Lure. "If you do, there may be gripping going, and it's just possible that you may suffer most."

"Oh, honour—honour bright!" protested Billy, with the utmost gravity; and then, as they crossed paws, each thought what a simpleton the other was, and how beautifully and cleverly he would shortly cheat him.

There being nothing further now to arrange, the three precious rascals again assured each other of their intention to keep good faith, and, with a warm shake of the hand all round, parted, and left the snow-covered hill by different paths.

On the afternoon of the following Friday, M'Lure, who had spent the whole day in collecting accounts, turned into a tavern in Leith to enjoy a bit of lunch and reckon up his net gains. He considered himself lucky, as, upon counting up the contents of the canvas bag, he found that out of one hundred and thirty pounds, only one small sum was represented by a cheque—a kind of money, he well knew, which would count only as so much waste paper a day or two later. He knew that, for their own good, the thieves would keep the appointment; but it never struck him that they might come a good deal in advance of the hour fixed, and it is questionable if he would have felt quite as comfortable had he known that, ever since he left the office in the morning, he had been persistently followed at a respectable distance by no other than his beloved friend, Billy Pagan. Such is life, and more especially criminal life—they cannot trust their dearest friends!

M'Lure had stepped into a box in the public-house; but the biscuit and cheese, nay, even the spirits he had ordered, stood untouched on the table, while he carefully counted out and

parcelled away the money he had received, and the affectionate eyes of Billy, just visible above the partition behind him, followed his movements with the most heartfelt devotion and interest. Mr Pagan had noted the fact that M'Lure, his respected employer, had not in this case entered the public-house to draw a brewer's account, and with a sharpness and diligence worthy of a better cause, had boldly walked in after him, ordered a glass of spirits, and taken possession of the next box. Nor did he now regret the trouble or trifling outlay, for every muttered word, and every action of the cashier, seemed to point to a grievous attempt at swindling his partners in crime. M'Lure carefully put aside all the notes, silver, and gold, wrapped them in a newspaper, and pocketed them ; and then, pulling out the canvas bag from his breast-pocket, he carefully placed in it the cheque—worthless paper to a thief—and as many coppers as he could find in all his pockets put together. This done, he thoughtfully weighed the canvas bag in his hand, but the result did not seem to please him greatly.

"Too light," he muttered ; to which truthful confession Billy hissed out a vengeful, "I should think it is, by near a hundred pound. On'y wait till I get ye in a dark corner, I'll pound yer."

This hiss, however, was quite unnoticed by the cashier, who pulled the bell and asked as a favour to be obliged with three or four shillings' worth of coppers. These being brought and paid for, he again produced the canvas bag, filled it nearly to the neck with coppers and a number of square cuts out of a newspaper, made to resemble a number of folded bank notes ; and then restoring the whole to his breast-pocket, he finished his lunch with the air of a man who had performed a righteous duty.

"Well, he must think us precious green if he expects that we wouldn't look in all his pockets when we're at it," thought Billy, who considered the whole as an insult to his own genius ; but as M'Lure left the shop and found his way to the nearest grocer's, Billy was forced to acknowledge that his estimate of his friend's abilities had been a hasty one. M'Lure bought and paid for an ordinary quarter-of-a-pound tin canister of mustard ; and then taking his way to the nearest dark stair, he emptied the mustard in a corner, and put in its place the notes, gold, and silver, which ought to have been reposing in the canvas bag. His arrangements now appeared to be complete, for he made straight for Leith Walk, which he ascended at a smart

pace, followed by Billy, gnashing his teeth, and in an undertone bitterly execrating the depravity of human nature. At the end of Pilrig Street a shadow slipped out and joined Billy in silence, but with an inquiring look in its eyes. The shadow was Mr Snaggs.

"A do, by gum!" was all Billy said, but it was uttered in a tone that made Alley Snaggs feel affectionately for the neddy under his coat, and gaze forward at the form of the cashier much as a butcher might gaze at a fat ox on killing-days.

M'Lure did not ascend the walk nearly as far as Blenheim Place, although the hour appointed for the meeting had already arrived. He merely cut into a narrow and lonely walk on the left hand, called the Lover's Lane, leading across bare fields towards the London Road. The wall at one side was not particularly high, and, after getting far beyond prying eyes, M'Lure got over with a quick scramble into a field at the other side, and then, selecting a stony and weedy corner as the least likely to be disturbed, he proceeded to dig with his hands and a pocket-knife a hole deep enough to form a grave for the valuable tin canister. Just as he had the canister deposited in the hole, and was about to cover it over with stones and earth, in giving a hasty look around to see that he was unobserved, he was scared and petrified by beholding a white face glaring down on him from the top of the wall, and with a second keen look he had recognized Billy Pagan!

"Good evenin', guv'nor!" said Billy; but no jocular smile accompanied the words, and the deadly glitter of his eyes went through the heart of the cashier like cold steel. M'Lure made a hasty snatch at the canister and staggered back, uncertain what to say or do.

"Ye're busy, I see," hissed Billy, getting up on top of the wall, and playfully tapping the cold stones with the lead-headed neddy in his hands. "Takin' care o' the money, I s'pose, and makin' sure it don't go amissin', like the coppers in yer bag, or the dummy screws w'ich I seed yer cut out o' the noospaper?"

M'Lure gazed at his dear friend like one suddenly stricken dumb, and Billy, who had a good reason for chaining his eye and preventing him from glancing round, softly continued his rebuke.

"I told yer what to look for if ye cut up and tried to play double; so if ye want to save yer skin, hand over that tin canister!"

"What! would you rob me?" cried M'Lure, starting back in fresh alarm.

"Rob yer? didn't yer employ me to rob yer? logically answered Billy, trying the neddy in loving swoops through the air at imaginary heads. "Fork over, or it'll be wuss for ye."

"Don't dare, or I'll shout for the police!" desperately answered M'Lure.

"Do, and tell 'em what ye was berryin' the money in the tin canister for," defiantly answered Billy, keeping a sharp look-out behind his victim. "If they don't understand yer, I'll help them."

Utterly baffled, and now actually afraid of the man before him, M'Lure said—

"Very well, Pagan, you've done me fairly. Suppose we arrange the matter?"

"As soon as ye please," coolly replied Billy. "Hand over the money, coppers and all, and yer watch along with it."

"Monstrous! really, Billy? Help! Murder! Ah!"

A great swoop of Alley Snaggs' arms from behind had pinned the cashier into helpless rigidity, and taking that for his cue, Billy leaped from the wall, and with the rapidity of lightning dealt the unfortunate man two terrific blows on the head with the neddy. With the first blow M'Lure staggered blindly, but with the second he dropped like a log on the snow-covered ground. In a twinkling Pagan had snatched up the canister, secured the canvas bag as well as the purse and watch of the cashier, and then, dividing the spoil between them, the two thieves were about to fly the spot, when a sudden thought caused Billy to pause.

"He said we was to tear his coat and rip up his shirt front," he said, coolly, to his companion, as he kicked vengefully at the prostrate form. "He was to pretend to be senseless—he, he, he! There ain't much pretendin' about it—ch, Alley!" and then, while Mr Snaggs growled out an affirmative, "That's right—so say I," he tore up the cashier's overcoat and everything else about him that would rend easily, and then lightly leaped the wall, and vanished with Mr Snaggs in the direction of their den in Monteith's Close.

M'Lure, after lying senseless for nearly an hour, at last recovered sufficiently to be able to crawl under a gate, and along to the end of the lane, where he was found by the policeman on the beat, with a sympathising crowd gathered round and assisting to support him. He had really got a most brutal

smashing from the two ruffians, but whether deservedly or not I will not take upon me to decide. It was written about two thousand years ago that the "way of transgressors is hard," and nothing that I have ever seen or heard has led me to believe that the decree has yet been altered or annulled. Still, stupid and muddled as he found himself, M'Lure had the acuteness to see that his position was a dangerous one, and that to betray his assailants' identity was only to bring certain ruin and disgrace upon himself. When conveyed to the Central Office in a cab, therefore, he gave not only a vague description of the garroters, but one in some respects positively false. One of the thieves he described as short and dumpy, and the other as a man with a crutch, like a beggar. The crutch, he asserted, had been used to beat him about the head, while the short man had helped to strangle him. In making this statement, which, of course, completely nonplussed us in our searches, M'Lure had a double object in view, namely, to divert suspicion from the thieves themselves, and then to get back, if possible, the biggest share of the plunder.

Next morning, therefore, when Billy had the morning papers read to him by a friend, he was delighted to learn that a change of air, in which he had meditated indulging, in company with his friend Snaggs, would now be quite unnecessary. For some days, however, they cautiously kept themselves on short commons, only drawing as much money as they needed from the hide at the back of their fireplace, and never once attempting to pass one of the bank notes, which unfortunately formed the greater part of the plunder. On the fourth or fifth night after the robbery, Billy Pagan was not a little surprised to find himself stopped on the street, in the dark, by a man with his head in a bandage, whom he had some difficulty in recognising as M'Lure.

"I've been watching for you these two nights," said the cashier. "Of course you'll guess the reason?"

"Not I. What is it?" coolly returned Pagan.

"I want my share, to be sure."

"You've got it already—the *whoppin'*," gravely answered Pagan without a vestige of a twinkle in his eyes. "The money's ours, an' we mean to keep it."

M'Lure appeared to ponder for a moment or two, and then cautiously said—

"Are you quite sure you have it all?"

"Yes, very near. It's stowed away in the hide," unguard-

edly answered Pagan. "I don't think you'll send the police there to look for it now, for if ye did I should tell all."

"What can you do with the notes?" cunningly asked M'Lure. "When I was reporting the robbery I said I thought the numbers of the notes might come back to my memory. If they do they'll only be waste paper to you, for they'll be stopped at the bank ; so what will you take for the lot ?"

Now this was exactly the question which had for some days been agitating Mr Pagan's breast. It did not suit him, however, to show his weak spot all at once—at least till he was assured of the other's intention to act without treachery or double dealing.

"There's nigh ten pounds in hard cash," he slowly got out at last. "Stake down other fifty, and the whole of the notes is yours, which will only make our share, fair and square."

"I agree. Where shall I meet you, to hand over the money?" said M'Lure, with suspicious readiness. "Let it be some out-of-the-way place—say in the Queen's Park, near the Cat-Nick—where I am not likely to be seen."

"Ay, and where ye may have the pegs waitin' to pinch us, money and all ! No, thank ye," was the cheering reply.

"If I wanted to do that," calmly replied M'Lure, "I would not need to go to the Park to get it done ; I could find you at any time, or the money either."

There seemed to be a show of reason in this, and at last, after much roundabout talking and arranging, the two worthies parted, after Pagan had agreed to bring the notes to a given spot on Salisbury Craigs. But down in his den, and with the rugged Mr Snaggs to advise him, Pagan changed his mind as to one little item, as, indeed, M'Lure had shrewdly anticipated from the first.

"We'll go," said the two thieves, with many a chuckle ; "but we won't take the notes with us. We'll leave them safe in the hide while we go and collar the extra fifty pounds."

At about nine o'clock on the following night, M'Lure took up his station in a stair in High Street directly opposite Monteith Close, and from the stair window he soon had the satisfaction of witnessing the departure of his amiable companions, Pagan and Snaggs, in the direction of the Queen's Park. The moment he was certain they were fairly off, he wandered down among the Cowgate brokers, earnestly inquiring if they had a strong rope to sell. The article was not easily obtained, and, what was worse, most of the shops were closing,

but something like what he required did at last fall in his way, and with this in his hands he made for Monteith's Close as fast as legs could carry him. He had been only once in the den of the two thieves, but that brief visit had convinced him of the hopelessness of trying to enter by the door. He climbed the long stair, got out on the roof by the open hatch, and, fastening his rope securely to a chimney, cautiously ventured to swing himself over the edge on to the ledge of the window nearest the top, which, of course, was that giving light to Mr Pagan's home. The window was not fastened; indeed, the tenants had never looked for an attack from that quarter, and had expended all their ingenuity in strengthening the door; and with a sharp hurl M'Lure had the window up, and swung himself into the room. Without even striking a light, he walked straight to the fireplace, bent down flat on his face, and, thrusting his hand in below the grate, removed a stone behind, and brought out—the tin canister! With a hurried wrench he had the lid off, and satisfied himself that the notes were really there, and then warned by hurried footsteps outside, he made a rapid flight towards the window. The fact was that Billy Pagan, with a dawning suspicion of treachery, had left Snaggs at the Cat-Nick alone, while he returned hastily to Monteith's Close to make sure of the safety of their valuables.

Just as M'Lure got out at the window the door flew open. Pagan took in the state of affairs at a glance, and, crossing the floor like a flash, he caught the struggling cashier by the throat, while with the other hand and his teeth he opened a pocket-knife, the sharp blade of which he soon had across the strained rope over M'Lure's head.

"Deliver up the swag!" he hissed, cutting away at the frail rope as he spoke, "or, by crickey, I'll send ye so deep that ye'll never get up again!"

With a rasping tear the rope gave way, but M'Lure at the same moment managed to make a desperate clutch forward and seized Pagan by the bushy hair. At the same moment he sank on his knee on the window sill, and received the point of Pagan's knife in his shoulder. The vicious stab roused him in a moment, and with a terrible yell he got hold of the knife hand by the wrist, and thus pinning Pagan, mercilessly began to gnaw his ugly face with his teeth.

The outcry which followed was so infernal, that even that queer neighbourhood was roused, and I myself, with a couple of policemen at my back, was attracted by the crowd which

gathered round to witness the fearful struggle. We soon got up to the den and beat down the ferocious Pagan, and with much difficulty got his hands handcuffed behind his back. Then the cashier made a rambling statement as to how he had, unaided, come on a clue to the stolen money, and resolved to follow it out for himself; and that he had watched the thieves depart, after overhearing by chance how they had hidden the money.

For a few hours, in the hurry and excitement of the capture, M'Lure was looked upon as a hero; but when Pagan and Snaggs, questioned in separate cells, made a clean breast of the whole affair, and agreed so wonderfully in their statements, there came a slight change, for M'Lure himself was taken and locked up.

They were tried together; but I regret to say that M'Lure, through some insufficiency in the evidence, got off. Pagan and Snaggs got two years' imprisonment respectively, and appeared perfectly disconsolate on seeing M'Lure walk off—disgraced but not punished. The escape, however, was but of short duration. M'Lure was picked up in a stair in Rose Street some time after in an insensible condition, and, after lingering a fortnight, died of concussion of the brain. No one was ever convicted of the assault, which, I believe, arose from some cheating at billiards on M'Lure's part.

THE ROMANCE OF A WATCH.

I HAVE already given a case of mistaken identity as to persons, and I have now to give a very curious and interesting case of the same kind in regard to stolen property. Every one knows, or can see for themselves, if they care to walk through some of our large watchmaker's shops, how exactly alike two watches can be turned out. Makers themselves are sensible of this fact, and invariably number the watches, both works and case, for the purpose of identification. Now, as this numbering is carried out on a system peculiar to themselves, by which no repetition is possible, nothing but carelessness or stupidity on the part of the buyer can cause any confusion should one of the watches get lost or stolen. But it happens that this carelessness or stupidity is one of the most common things in the world. I wonder, often as such cases occur, that they do not come in more frequently. If a man loses his watch, it is a hundred chances to one if he even knows its number. Perhaps he will say, "I think it was so-and-so;" or perhaps he will take refuge behind some such phrase as "Know it again? I could tell it among a thousand." And all this helplessness and stupidity our sharpness and cleverness are supposed to make up for. God help us! we are only men like yourselves; and I think the patience of Job himself would have been exhausted with the reproaches that are sometimes unjustly heaped upon us.

John Allan, aged twenty-seven, and a working joiner by trade, was driven gleefully out to R—— one fine day in spring, along with a whole omnibusful of his companions and friends. The trip was an annual one, and all the company were known to each other. Allan had been twice with them before, and now had nothing to cloud his rather stupid mind. He looked forward to a day of enjoyment, fun, and frolic; but as there is no rose without thorns, so even at a sunny pic-nic strange and annoying things may occur to damp the universal joy. Sometimes the accident comes in the shape of a sprained ankle or a

broken arm or leg, or some luckless wanderer tumbles into the stream, to be fished out half or wholly drowned; but in this case it came in the shape of a strange and unaccountable robbery—the spiriting away of a watch.

Among the officious helpers who appeared when the omnibus pulled up at R—— was a half-drunken ostler or hanger on called Dan Pollock. This man helped off the hampers and cushions, directed the company to that part of the grounds set apart for their use, and exerted himself so prodigiously in carrying down heavy loads, lighting their fire, and carrying water, that he received a kind of oral engagement to remain and assist during the day. He did remain, and he did assist—particularly at the hamper containing the brandy and whisky, which he hovered round with affectionate interest.

But my business here is not with the pic-nic, which I did not see, but with a particular tree near the spot having a hollow trunk and wide-spreading branches, which I did see some time after. Close to this tree stood the hamper with the brandy and whisky, close to this hamper stood the attentive Dan Pollock, and close to all these a number of young men had gathered to make preparations for a foot-race among themselves for some trifling prizes. Among these pedestrians stood the aforementioned John Allan, and in the young joiner's waistcoat pocket at that moment ticked a capital eight-guinea lever watch. Four men were entered for the first foot-race, and these four—Allan being one—stripped to their trousers and shirts, laying their coats, waistcoats, neckties, and hats in a heap on the hamper aforesaid and enjoining Dick Pollock to “look after them.”

The race was run, and keenly contested, I have no doubt, for the attention of every one was so riveted on the competitors that not one of them afterwards remembered looking round, even for a moment, at the movements of the officious Dan Pollock. The winner was John Allan, and to him, therefore, with much merriment, was allotted the “valuable old violin,” in the prize list—a sixpenny toy fiddle, which had been carefully kept out of sight till the finish of the race. But, alas! the triumph on one hand and merriment on the other were of short duration. Allan resumed his things, felt for his watch, and found it gone! Startled and incredulous, he felt every pocket, searched about the hamper, looked on every side—in vain. At last his eye fell on the demure Dan Pollock, busy trying “if the tatties were bilin’ yet.”

"Hullo, you!" suddenly shouted Allan; "where's my watch?"

Dan turned round and stared at him in surprise.

"Were ye speakin' to me, sir?"

"Of course I was; you had charge of the things. I can't find my watch. Where is it?"

"Yer watch, man?" echoed Dan, with a drunken hiccough and a stolid look of stupidity. "Hem—is't no in yer pooch?"

"No, it's not; and what's more, if I don't get it sharp, you'll have to look out. I won't be robbed."

"Robbit?" echoed Dan, with a slight chuckle. "Man, there's no a thief in the place. It's very queer; I never saw ye wi' a watch."

"No, because there's no chain at it. But I had it, nevertheless, and it must be got."

The alarm was given, and every one joined in the search for the watch; but it was all in vain—the watch was not to be found. At last, when every one was looking suspiciously at another, and loud comments were dwindling into whispers, Dan stepped forward and said, in a grandiloquent style—

"Gentlemen, a watch which naebody has ever seen has been missed by ane o' the company. The watch was said to be in the claes on that hamper; I was nearest to the hamper a' the time, and I feel that my honour is suspekkit. Naething will satisfy me but that my claes should be searched by twa competent persons chosen frae the company."

This little speech was received with some applause, and the suggestion at once acted upon. Dan was minutely and carefully searched from top to toe, John Allan himself being one of the searchers, but it is needless to say without success. The watch was gone; but wherever it was hidden, it was not among the rags covering Mr Dan Pollock's honourable frame. And thus the case had to stand—a watch spirited away and hunted for in vain, and the drunken assistant volubly asserting his innocence, and offering to fight any one who said a word to the contrary.

The close of the day brought Allan in to the Central Office to us with a report of the affair. As usual in such cases, the interview was quite of a formal character, and very short. Still, it had an important bearing on what was to follow.

"What description of a watch was it?"

"An eight-guinea silver lever, with enamelled dial and sunk seconds."

"Do you know the number?"

"Yes; I think it was one, nought, nought, one—one thousand and one."

"The maker's name?"

"Staunton, Liverpool."

"That will do. If we hear of it we will let you know. Word will be sent through all the likely places, and if it is offered for sale we may send for you to identify your property."

"I can do that," said Allan, confidentially; "I could swear to it in a whole roomful."

That was all that took place. Mind, I don't say it is all that would have taken place had I been there; for, to my mind, as the case stood, it had some very broad features about it which pointed very decidedly in one direction for the criminal. But before anything could be done in that direction, as I have now to show, something occurred which mystified us all, and round which gathers the chief interest of this sketch.

The same night that Allan's loss was reported, David Pridie, student of Divinity, sat up all night in his lodging—a miserable garret in the Crosscauseway—boring into Hebrew and mathematics, with his head mopped in wet towels to keep away drowsiness. The face below the crown of wet towels was white and emaciated, and but for a determined compression of the lips and peculiar brightness of the eyes, would have looked ghastly in the extreme. The young man was one of hundreds—a poor student who had struggled on, God only knows how, into his last year, with the smiling face of a gentleman turned to the world, but, behind all, suffering the agonies of the most pinching want. He had friends—rich friends—in dozens, but not one of them dreamed of the quiet, genteel student being in want; and so they smiled and joked and laughed with him, and asked him when he was to be licensed, and promised to come to hear his first sermon, and told him not to study so hard, and bade him good-day. And then the poor student himself, with a fine nobility of soul, did everything in his power to keep up the delusion. All the pinching was veiled—even his own landlady had not the faintest idea but that he lived like a lord, though he seldom took a meal in the house; and when he spoke of his independent income which he had by his mother's death—about twenty pounds a year—and private tuition in abundance, of course nobody could think but that his income was fifty pounds at

least, and the man, in fact, rolling in wealth. There was even a faint wonder expressed at times as to why a gentleman so well off should ever think of being a preacher; but he only smiled, and said he had an ambition that way.

But now, on this eventful night, a deadly faintness had come over him, and with it came a flashing fear that after all he might break down when nearly at the goal. He threw down the book, whose dark broad characters he could no longer distinguish, and staggered blindly to his feet.

"What strange feeling is this?" he almost groaned. "Surely I am not—not turning ill? Ill at such a time?—it would be death. I would lose a whole year, and poor Carrie would break her heart in sympathy for my disappointment. Let me walk—walk; the fit will soon go off."

He left the support of the table and crawled along the floor, with the strange faintness increasing at every step. At last he felt himself drop into a seat, with the light growing dim and everything fading from sight and sense. With an iron will he shook off the feeling, weakly unfastened the wet towels from his forehead, and tried to wipe off the cold sweat which had suddenly gathered above his temples. As he did so he caught a glimpse of his own pinched features reflected in the dark window of the garret, and then for the first time a faint inkling of the truth dawned on his mind.

"This is hunger," he gasped—"want of food—proper nourishment. I have felt it tell on me year after year. If I could only stave it off a little longer—a little longer. Three months more, and I would be sure of the bursary; and with one year in the Divinity Hall the whole struggle would be over. Then, with a position equal to her own, I could claim Carrie, fortune and all, without a blush of shame. Three months—oh, God! am I to perish within the sight of the goal? Is there nothing I can do? Ah! what would Carrie think if she knew all? And yet at times I have half suspected, from the grave tenderness looking out of her eyes, that she has guessed my secret."

He dragged himself along to a trunk standing near, opened it, and began mechanically to turn over its contents.

"I must live," he said; "I must not break down now. And yet borrow I cannot; and I am afraid there is nothing left to sell or pledge unless this, my uncle's watch."

He took the watch in his hand—a fine lever, with enamelled dial and sunk seconds—and gazed at it till the tears came into his eyes.

"It was his dying gift," he whispered to himself; "and yet I fear it must go. I may get four or five pounds for it, and with that I can put over three months till I take the bursary."

He brightened at the thought, put back the things he had tumbled out of the trunk, and set himself to polish up the case of the watch, grown yellow with disuse. A faint streak of dawn was showing over Arthur's Seat and the Craigs when he had finished; and then he threw himself on the bed, dressed as he was, for three hours' feverish sleep. Breakfast caused him no trouble, seeing that on this particular morning he had none to take; and shortly after nine he got out into the sunlight, and over to one of the principal jewellers and watchmakers in the city, where, with much flushing and painful hesitancy, enough to stamp the best in the world a criminal, he offered the watch for sale.

The shopman took the watch without a word, deftly opened the case to examine the works, and then started slightly as he noted the stamped number and the maker's name. He glanced keenly into the face of the shrinking student, and then his quick suspicion seemed confirmed. Still, anxious to make every step secure, he turned to the book kept for the use of the police, and there the last entry, with the ink scarcely dry, stared him in the face—

"Silver lever, enamelled dial and sunk seconds, No. 1001. Staunton, maker, Liverpool."

The man's agitation and excitement might be excused, for he now held in his hand a silver lever exactly answering the description, and legibly stamped "No. 1001. Staunton, maker, Liverpool."

"Would you be good enough to step this way?" he said, getting out from behind the counter and leading the way to the back shop.

The student hesitated, and the man with a swift motion, imperceptible to the other, signalled to another shopman, who instantly got between the student and the door.

"Certainly," said David Pridie; "but is it necessary?"

"It is. I must show the watch to my master; all our purchases must go before him. Will you follow me?"

The student did follow him, but could scarcely understand why the door was fastened after them, and why master and man held a long consultation in whispers, during which the watch and a printed list were repeatedly referred to and compared

before ever looking at him or asking him to be seated. Neither could he understand why the master touched a bell-pull, which was answered by a tinkle in the shop and the hurried slamming of the outer door, as if some one had been despatched on a hasty errand.

The jeweller approached him at last, with the watch in his hand, and wearing an unaccountably grave and threatening aspect.

"Is this your own watch?" he sharply inquired.

"Yes."

"Where did you get it?"

"Get it?" The question was so harshly and rudely asked that he opened his eyes in surprise, and drew back with the answer on his lips. "I—I—would rather not say."

"Humph! I dare say; but you must."

"Must! Sir, you use strong language," haughtily returned the student. "You have only to say that you will not purchase the watch, and I will leave the shop and trouble you no more."

"Ah! but we will take good care that you do not leave the shop," was the jeering reply.

"Sir, you are insolent! Give me the watch, and open the door instantly!"

"One moment," said the jeweller. "You have got into trouble; but your appearance is in your favour, for you are not at all like a thief. Say, now, did you not find the watch?"

"I will not answer another question," was the blazing rejoinder. "Open the door."

"Very good—have your own way," coolly replied the other. "Open the door."

The door was opened, and a policeman appeared in the entrance. A dawning of the truth flashed on the student, and he staggered back, white and ashy.

"What—what does it all mean?" he at last gasped out.

The jeweller coolly handed the watch to the policeman, who carefully pocketed it, and then produced a pair of handcuffs, one link of which he snapped on his own wrist before turning to the horrified student.

"It means," said the policeman, with a knowing grin, "that the game's up, and you'd better take it easy. This watch has been stolen; so just slip your wrist in there and come along quietly to the Office."

"To the Office?—the Police Office?" gasped the student,

looking so white that the others thought he was going to faint. "Oh, the disgrace! Impossible!"

The policeman laughed.

"Should have thought of that afore you nailed the watch or brought it here," he remarked.

"Stole the watch? Man! there is some frightful mistake! I am a gentleman studying for the ministry," cried the excited young man, with all his soul in his face. "I never stole an article in my life; and as for appearing in the streets as a criminal, or in a Police Office, it would ruin me for life. Do, for Heaven's sake, give me the watch and let me go."

The jeweller was moved a little, and even whispered a moment to the policeman; but he was adamant.

"Can't. Duty, you know. Tell them all that at the Office, and perhaps they'll let you go."

He took the clammy hand of the student in his own, and was about to snap the other links of the handcuffs on the wrist, when suddenly, at the touch of the cold steel, the prisoner started back, dashed his open hand in the policeman's face, and was through the open doorway and out of the front shop like a flash. I know he should not have done it; but then he was in a high state of nervous excitement, brought on by long want and severe study. For a moment the policeman was staggered, and that gave the flying student a short start. Then came the fierce ringing cry, "Hi, hi! stop thief! stop thief!" and the policeman was out into the street running swiftly in his wake, and the two shopmen with him, and dozens of other shopmen and passengers speedily joined them in the exciting chase. Through the sunny streets, swifter than the wind, flew a white shadow of a man, panting for breath, and glancing fearfully back at the yelling crowd behind.

"I must escape, or I am disgraced for ever," he thought. "The whole world would laugh and jeer and hoot me, even were my innocence proved. The poor starveling forced to sell his watch! Oh, God! Death rather than that! If I could only run as once I did; but I am weak and giddy and faint—"

A hoarse yell in front, a thundering blow on the head from an officious assistant, who had sprung up before him, and he dropped like a stone. The rushing crowd gathered round the still figure and white face in some awe and fear, and even the policeman touched him gently and kindly.

"Poor chap! I'm afraid he's been forced to it through want. He doesn't seem to have an ounce of strength in his

body, or a bit of flesh on his bones. Quite a gentleman, too, in his manners! He looked at me in the shop so pitiful-like that I wish I could have let him off. Come, boys, lend a hand to carry him up to the Office. He won't hurt any of you, and he's not likely to break your backs with his weight."

I was standing at the mouth of the pend outside the Office when the strange prisoner was borne past, and at once followed the procession into the Office. A little cold water on his face and hands brought the prisoner back to his surroundings, and then he sat up to answer my questions.

"What is your name?"

"I refuse to tell."

"Ah! well—occupation?"

"I refuse to tell that also. It would only injure me to do so. I am innocent, as you will very soon discover."

He looked like it, sitting there with his calm, truthful eyes, looking full into mine, as he tried to staunch the blood trickling from the ugly cut on his forehead, and I began to feel for him. Still I was annoyed, for if his innocence were to be proved, he was taking the worst possible means to bring about such a result.

I paused for a few moments, and then, after some consultation, asked—

"Have you any explanation to offer for having this watch in your possession?"

"None. It was my uncle's; I have had it in my possession for nearly five years."

"Is your uncle alive?"

"No. It was his dying gift to me."

"Ah! that's awkward. But have you no friends who can prove that they have seen it in your possession?"

"None—none. I never wore it; the works were dirty when I got it, and I have never yet been—been—inclined to have it put to rights. It has lain in my trunk since I got it."

"Excuse me, it looks bright and clean outside—not at all as if it had lain by unused."

"I polished it up this morning before I took it out to sell."

"You were in want of money then?"

He reddened to the roots of the hair at the question, and then his answer came out low and distinct—

"I refuse to say."

"Perhaps there has been a mistake—"

"There has been a mistake—a frightful mistake!" he inter

rupted, choking with indignation, "and to make matters worse, I cannot stir in the affair. The remedy would be worse than the disease."

I stared at him now with just the faintest inkling of the truth breaking on my mind.

"I have surely seen you about the College?" I remarked, keenly watching his face. "Are you not a student?"

He crimsoned and paled, and began to tremble in every limb, but maintained a determined silence.

"I see I am right," I continued, following up the advantage. "When you interrupted me I was about to say that the young man who has lost a watch answering this in description has been sent for, and will be here presently. If there is a mistake, and the watch is not his, you will at once be set at liberty; but if he identifies it as his you must be detained while I try to discover your name and residence through the College books or some of the students."

I was quite unprepared for the terrible agitation caused by this simple announcement of my plans. He covered his face with his hands and groaned aloud; then sinking on his knees, with his eyes fixed on my face in piteous entreaty, and his hands clasped imploringly, he cried—

"Oh, sir! anything rather than that. Do not, for Heaven's sake, disgrace me for ever!"

"Disgrace!" I echoed. "Where is the disgrace? I thought you said you were innocent?"

"And I am. I swear it, as I shall answer to God!"

"What do you mean by innocent?" I impatiently asked. "Do you mean that you did not steal the watch?"

"I mean that it belongs to me, and has done for five years."

"We shall soon see that," I said, as the door opened and Allan appeared, "for here is the man who has to decide all. Look at this watch, and tell me if it is like that which you lost yesterday."

The joiner smiled right out the moment his eye rested on the lever in my hand.

"Like it!" he echoed; "it is it. Look, there is a clour on the case which I once did when wearing it at my work. And look!" and he opened the case and pointed to the number and the maker's name. "I think you can see for yourself that it is mine. Why, I could swear to it anywhere."

He was so positive, that my last hope fled; and considering the case settled, I turned to our prisoner, fully expecting to

find him overwhelmed with confusion and guilt. But no. There he was, staring at us with widely opened eyes, without a sign of fear or agitation, and even with a trace of a wondering smile on his face.

"This is certainly a most extraordinary case," he said. "As positive am I that that watch has lain in my trunk and never seen the light of day for five years. I can swear it, just as firmly and truly as this person."

Again I was staggered. Indeed, with every fresh speech or assertion it seemed as if I were destined to be swayed from one opinion to another.

"Yes, but it so happens that you are the suspected person, and consequently are supposed to have an interest in so swearing," I drily returned. "Can you think of no one likely to substantiate your statements?"

"No one—unless, perhaps, my landlady may have chanced to look into my trunk at any time. I never considered it worth locking. I am willing to take you to my lodging, that you may make what inquiries you please, if it can be done quietly, without handcuffs or any appearance of my being a prisoner."

"Good; and you give your word of honour as a gentleman not to attempt to escape?"

"I do."

"Then we will go at once," I said, in conclusion; and leaving Allan at the Office, we at once set out for the Crosscauseway.

But we had only the walk for our pains. We found the lodging and the landlady; but she was either very unlike her kind, or refused to acknowledge the prying habit. The aspect of my prisoner during the return journey was melancholy in the extreme; and as he sternly refused to give me his confidence, it was quite out of my power either to cheer or advise him. But now we had waded about as far into darkness and confusion as it was possible for us to go. A change was to come, and that by a means, to my mind, highly interesting.

As we were passing along Nicolson Street, the rattle of a carriage caused my companion to look up. I noticed him start and turn away in confusion, after bowing to some one whom he appeared to have recognised; but the clue to his behaviour only came when the carriage drew up further along, and a young lady descended and anxiously awaited our approach, with both concern and alarm imprinted on her pretty countenance.

"Oh, David, what is the matter?" she cried, taking the

shaking hand of my pallid prisoner within her own. "You are ill—and that dreadful cut on your brow. What has happened?"

The student struggled, and choked, and fought with himself, but not a word could he articulate. The tears came into the young lady's eyes, and, paler than the man at my side, she turned to me.

"It is some difficulty about a watch," I explained; and then I briefly let out words that left her as pale as death, and at last brought speech to the tongue of my prisoner.

"And oh, Carrie! such a dreadful charge!" he groaned; "and chased through the streets like a criminal. I am ruined for life!"

"You are not!" she cried, her eyes flashing with sudden determination, and the whole expression of her face instantly changing. "I will spend hundreds rather than that the charge shall be made. You are innocent, and ought never to have run; but, poor fellow! I daresay you were not yourself at the time."

"I was not. I was half-maddened with fear lest people—"

"I know, I know," she hastily interrupted with the fine tact which only a woman can show. "You were afraid people might think you had been prompted to sell it through want of money. The thought is absurd, of course, but people are cruel enough to say anything. But don't—there's a dear, good fellow!—don't distress yourself more about it; for, though I should have to spend my whole fortune on it, the real thief shall be ferreted out. Where can we see the man who has been robbed?"

"At the Police Office," I replied, more and more pleased with the high spirit and warm affection of the young lady. "But that is scarcely a place for a young lady."

"He is to be my husband," was her calm reply, given not with a blush, but a look of pale concern and deep affection into her face. "And wherever he has to go, my duty is to support and protect him."

Woman, woman, all the world over! Shifting as sand when uninspired by love; but once fairly grounded in affection, a whole mountain of strength—a rock against which all the storms of misfortune, rage, or hate may hurl themselves in vain.

We got into the carriage at the lady's own imperative request, and were driven back to the Office, where we succeeded in extracting from Allan the particulars which I have placed at the beginning of this sketch.

The lady looked at me when we had finished, and I looked Ther; and I believe we each read one thought in the other's a sig—"We must go out to R——."

ing s^o prepared to set out at once; but first she succeeded in

"Tg out one point, which I believe was the first to firmly posi^{ss} me with the idea that it was a case of mistaken iden^{see}

firⁱ Was your watch going when you lost it?" she inquired of an.

"Certainly it was. I wound it up in the morning before I started."

"Then this cannot be the watch," said the quickwitted young lady, "for the watchmaker himself admits that it is out of repair."

"I don't care what the watchmaker or any one else says," was the surly reply: "that's my watch."

We left the Office, leaving both Allan and the prisoner behind; and with that absence of false pride which always marks true gentility, the young lady desired me to step into the carriage beside her, and another hour saw us at R——, inquiring diligently for Mr Dan Pollock.

"He's in the Polis Office, along there," was the startling news we got at last from a woman at a door; and she indicated the little station further back. "He's got ta'en in for liftin' twa sarks aff a hedge, and for striking a laddie."

"What was he striking the boy for?" I asked, with great interest.

"Ay, ay, ye may ask that," was the voluble reply. "It was for naething but gaun near ane o' the trees down by at the grunds to harry a nest, as if he—the drunken beast—had mair richt to the trees than onybody else."

"Do you mean to say that Dan was keeping the boy off a particular tree?"

"Jist that, and naething else."

"What was his reason for that?"

"Reason?" laughed the woman; "there's no a reason in him, body or sowl. But if he had ane, ye'd better ask himsel'."

"Do you know the boy?"

"I think I should ken him, when he's my ain sister's bairn. Ye can see him for yersel' if ye gang into the next hoose."

I thought for a moment, but chose rather to go first to the Police Station. But we could get nothing out of Pollock, so

our stay was not a lengthy one. A kind of gossipy commotion had spread through the place consequent on our arrival, and our return the boy was not difficult to find. I took him, from the eager listeners.

"Here, my boy," I said, holding out half-a-crown which she young lady had slipped into my hand, "if I give you this you think you could show this lady and me the tree that then struck you for going near?"

"Ay can I," he joyfully returned. "Jist follow me, sir, and he was off quite as fast as we cared to walk."

We got down to the grounds below, near the stream, and then he led us straight to a tree with wide-spreading branches. The spot was littered with straw, scraps of paper, and cinders—traces of the pic-nic the day before; but the tree itself was the chief attraction. A wide hole in the bark, leading deep into the trunk, caught my eye the moment I was in under the sweeping branches. Without a moment's hesitation I plunged in my hand just as the boy said—

"Ay, that's where the nest is."

But my hand was too big, or I was not well enough acquainted with the mode of entry. I drew back, and then the boy, throwing off his jacket, and buckling up his shirt sleeve as only boys can, with eager alacrity cried—

"Jist gie me a back, sir, an' I'll sune bring up the nest."

I gave him the necessary "back;" he brought out the nest in his hand, and! lo and behold, among the little golden eggs there was one broad silver one—the stolen watch!

The boy stared at what he had brought out in a kind of petrified astonishment; but I only smiled, and as for the young lady, she danced and cried with joy till I thought she would have gone into hysterics. We returned to Edinburgh, where Allan looked intensely foolish on being shown the watch proper which we had brought with us, and which was identical with the other, except in the number—Allan's watch being numbered 1061 instead of 1001.

David Pridie, of course, with many apologies, was set at liberty, and I expected to hear of it no more; but I was wrong, for the very next day the young lady's carriage drew up at my stair, and she herself, with much hesitation, explained the object of her visit.

"My intended husband," she said, "wishes to bring an action for damages against the authorities. I wish this prevented, and have here brought a hundred pounds which I wish you to

place in his hands by way of *solatium*, without for a moment allowing him to suspect that it comes from me."

I was very dubious about lending myself to the pious fraud ; but the pleading eyes of the young lady, with the noble object which I could see shining through all, were too much for me. The hundred pounds were duly handed over ; and never till they were married, a year or two after, did David Pridie guess or suspect that he owed the comfort of his last year at College to the generous heart and noble delicacy of his wife.

M'SWEENEY AND TWO TIGRESSES.

WHENEVER M'Sweeney was asked what was the most perilous position in which he had ever been placed, he would turn pale and breathe out the three words, "The two tigresses ;" and the prominence which he himself gave to the incidents has induced me to record the experience here. Yet few will take the same view of matters as did my chum. The word "danger" to different persons has a different meaning. A sailor, bowling along at ten knots an hour before a terrific gale, thinks with pity of us poor citizens sneaking along the streets in danger of flying slates or chimney cans ; while a collier, lying on his side, hard at work with his pick under a block of some tons weight, thinks how snug and safe he is compared with the poor man driving the ploughshare against the bleak wind far overhead ; and these men are only representatives of dozens of other classes. We have each our own idea of danger—from the lisping child, with its "black bogle," to the tottering old man mumbling out his fears of poverty and the workhouse ; so M'Sweeney need not be derided for dreading widows.

Mrs Regan was a widow, six feet high, and having an arm as thick and strong as two bedposts stuck together. She had four children, the eldest of whom was in a Reformatory, and supported herself and them by labouring diligently as a washerwoman. It was an evil hour for M'Sweeney when she came to live next door to him in the Pleasance—at least, he chose to think so ; for there was a widow on the same flat already, and, even protected by his sister Honor, he had but a sorry time of it. One morning he appeared at the Office pale and trembling.

"What's the matter with you ?" I asked. "Are you ill ?"

"No ; sorra a bit."

"Have you met any one—any of 'our bairns ?'"

"Niver a wan."

"Then what is wrong ?"

"I'll tell ye ;" and his voice sank to a dreadful whisper as he spoke into my ear. "There's another widow come to our stair, and she's got her eye on me already."

"Ho, ho ! then the washerwoman, Mrs M'Lean, will be cut out ?"

"No, faith ; this one's a washerwoman too ; I'll have two to fight instead of wan," was the shuddering reply.

"What a lady-killer !"

"Killer ? by japers ! no, they'll be the killers, and I'll only be the poor dead victim. I'll have a dreadful life betwixt the two."

He left me there with an ominous shake of the head ; and for some days I contented myself with a few simple inquiries as to how he was maintaining his ground. Mrs M'Lean was a Scotchwoman—short and dumpy, and had also two or three children ; but though she had been first in the field, I believe M'Sweeney dreaded his own countrywoman most. Mrs M'Lean could only profess friendship, and come in and pounce on his shirts, which she would wash and starch and iron fit for any nobleman in the land to wear, and charge nothing for her pains ; but Mrs Regan, being six feet high, could almost twist his sister Honor round her little finger, by talking of Ireland, making her presents, and finding out all her weak points as to dress, which she flattered and fostered with consummate skill. In volume of tongue, too, she had a slight advantage—it was indeed nearly a tie between them ; but, on the whole, the victory lay with old Ireland. One or two encounters on M'Sweeney's threshold converted them into bitter foes long before circumstances brought things to a climax.

"I dinna ken what that glaikit auld besom, Mrs Regan, means by aye comin' about your hoose, Miss M'Sweeney," Mrs M'Lean would say, popping into the house with her arms steaming from the wash-tub the moment she had heard her rival quit the house. "There maun be something bad aboot her, for I never get a ceevil word oot o' her mooth ; and as for the things she pretends to wash, I wadna pick them aff the street—as yelly as a duck's fit, and no near sae clean ; and hoo folk can gie her their things to be sp'ilt, as I said to the wuman up the stair—a decent body that never has an ill word for ony body,—beats me to tell ; for when I gang through the green and see the dirty trollopy things hingin' up, the neb o' my nose fair turns up wi' shame and indignation, till the auld besom bangs up her windy and cries owre, 'I'll thank ye, Mrs M'Lean,

not to durty me clean cloïhes.' Clean claes! Ha, ha, ha! the auld Irish besom! I beg your pardon, Miss M'Sweeny; but ye ken a' Irish folk are no like you, and your brave, noble brither—that daurin' man that thinks naething o' grippin' a dizzy fiefs at ance. Oh! what it maun be to be sister to sic a warrior! and the wuman that gits him for a man'll hae mair to be prood o' than the Queen sittin' on her throne, though he aye says he's no gaun to marry, just to keep that great morrochy o' a weedy at a distance, in case she should fair wear the life oot o' him. Fine div I ken what she aye stops him on the stair for, and speirs sae smoothly after his big tae, or ony rummle-gumshion that comes into her heid. Ye needna laugh, Miss M'Sweeny—ye're but a young lassie, and dinna ken onything about the tricks o' weedys; though, to be sure, I'm a weedy mysel', only I'm no ane o' the wantin' kind, as I say to yer brave brither when he tells me what he thinks o' me, and a' thae kind things which he has sic a sweet way o' pittin' aff—I maun think o' my bairns afore anither man; and though I was awfu' young marrit, and maist folk say I canna' be abune twenty-four, though I'm mair than a year and a half aulder, it wad be a very handsome and brave man that wad mak' me change my state. Ech, ay! an' Maister M'Sweeny has sic a way o' gettin' roond a body wi' his daurin' adventures and what not—I'm sure I fair pity him when that shameless auld hizzy, Mrs Regan, opens her gabblin' tongue on him; for he aye says, like a'boday else, that I'm nae talker;" and then without allowing her hearer to get in a monosyllable, she would rattle into another sentence as long as Leith Walk, which, however it might digress, always came back to the same object—M'Sweeny himself.

Mrs Regan was even more plain-spoken; indeed, every fresh move of the rivals was in this way made known to Honor almost as soon as it was conceived.

"Sure, the divil himself wouldn't keep that ould harridan, Mrs M'Lean, off your poor brother, Miss Honor," she would say, at soon as she in her turn found the coast clear. "She haunts that man like a shadow, or like Satan waitin' and watchin' for a sowl he had bought and paid for. Don't laugh, darlint; sure its meself can see he's wearin' away under her torments; and only the other day he looked so bad that I stopped him on the stair to see if he'd been sick in the night time. He said no, but looked so sweet and lovely that I ax'd him, kind o' wheedlin' ways, what state he thought was the

happiest out of heaven? Says he, 'It's the state of India.' An' says I, 'How's India the happiest place now?' an' then he turned up his eyes so solemn an' said, 'Because there's no widdys there—they burn 'em all up wid their husbands.' Faith! 'twas easy to see who he was drivin' at—Mrs M'Lean, the widdy that pesters the life out of him. Bad cess to the ould fool! she'd get small leave to bother him if he'd a kindly an' lovin' wife to look after him, though I only say, 'Go along wid ye,' when he comes bothering me about such a thing. Ye needn't smile, Miss Honor, for ye're only a simple girl, wid no more in your head than Paddy Rafferty's drum wid the ends out; and if it was me, I'd stand up for the poor boy and be a mother to him, though I'm but a girl like yourself, till either she was druv to the other end of the world, or all the blood was out of me own body. Ochone, ochone! what men have to suffer before they get a good strong woman to take care of them!" and then she would stretch herself up like one of Frederick the Great's grenadiers, and slowly shake an enormous fist in the air, as if already eager for the fray.

M'Sweeney's usual ill luck gave them both a chance for a final struggle. In chasing some one down Carrubber's Close, he slipped his foot and came heavily down on the ground, spraining his ankle, and rendering a few days' rest and retirement from active service absolutely imperative. About this time it happened that his sister Honor had been called away to Ireland by the death of a relative; and thus, with the coast fairly clear, and the hapless victim almost tied to his chair, the two rivals collected all their energies for the attack, "for all the world," as M'Sweeney piteously remarked to me, "like two hungry tigers snapping for a bone."

"And I am the bone," he added to me, when I had gone up to see him and found him coddled up in an easy-chair by the fire, and six different dishes of gruel and other dainties, which had been brought in by the widows, ranged untasted on the table by his side; "and ye know, Jamie, that when tigers quarrel over a bone, the bone isn't over safe—doesn't get the best of tratement. It's sure to be bitten or torn."

"Yes, unless it could gently withdraw itself from between them, and let them have it out alone," I laughingly suggested.

"Bedad, you've hit it!" he suddenly cried, slapping his lame leg, and then squirming with the pain. "I've been thinking, and thinking, and bothering me head all to no purpose how to do it, but I've got it at last."

"Got what?" I asked, in surprise.

"Och! don't you bother yer head; I know myself," he darkly returned, but with more elation than I had seen in his face for many a day. "I'll try it anyhow, an' if it don't succeed, p'r'aps I'll go mad an' kill them both; so don't be surprised if ye see me up at the Justiciary for murder."

He would say no more on the point—would not even speak of the widows while I stayed with him; and I was only to understand the meaning of the whole by the spectacle which met my gaze two mornings later, when the second case was called at the Police Court. But as soon as I took my leave, and Mrs M'Lean came in to ask after his comfort and welfare, he set to work to carry out the scheme which my careless words had prompted. The kindest inquiries, the most loving attentions, could draw from him nothing but the shortest monosyllables and profound sighs, till at last surprise prompted her to inquire the cause.

"The cause? Och! Mrs M'Lean, you decaivin' woman, can ye look me in the face, and say ye don't know the cause," cried M'Sweeney, putting on, with a desperate effort, an easy and fascinating smile.

The widow was in a flutter. He had never before spoken so plainly, and she tried hard to blush, but failing in that, put her finger in the corner of her mouth, and turned away with a coy simper.

"Oh, Maister M'Sweeney! hoo should I ken anything about men's troubles?" she broke in at last. "Maybe ye've a sairheid, or a—"

"A sore heart, ye mane?" sighed M'Sweeney, with a writhe of disgust which he had to hide in the shawl round his head. "I'm miserable, I'm unhappy."

"Mercy me! I shouldna stand here and listen to sic words. What wad the neebors say?"

"Och! the words 'll do ye no harm, and ye might show a little pity for me, and help me out of my trouble."

"And so I wull, Maister M'Sweeney. What's like yer trouble?"

"It's love," said M'Sweeney, trying to look sweet, and then adding to himself, under his breath, "love av a single life."

"Love!" she echoed, making a show of darting out of the room and leaving him, but then altering her mind when he made no attempt to move or stop her. "Hem—aweel—that is to say, Maister M'Sweeney, I'll no deny but what I guessed

that much long syne ; but, ye see, though ye're a brave man, an' can gang without a grain o' fear among thae awfu' characters, and though I admire brave men—especially Irishmen—I dinna ken what I can say to your proposal."

"What proposal?" sharply inquired M'Sweeney, the hair almost rising on his head at the thought.

"Didn't ye ask me the noo to—to—?"

"Yes, to help me in a difficulty, that's all," was the arch reply.

"Aweel, I'll no say but I micht if that's a' ye want," returned the widow, more coldly. "But, eh me ! if I didna think ye was gaun to mak' yersel' comfortable for life by takin' to yersel' a wee bit wifie."

"That's it," groaned M'Sweeney. "However could I take a 'wee wifie' if that great big horse of a woman keeps nag-nagging at me every blessed day in the world? Oh, Mrs M'Lean! it's her that's botherin' me—that widdy, Mrs Regan. I don't know what I might do if I could only get rid of that woman."

"What, the ir^rudent besom!—the red-faced, whisky-tacketed randy! does she daur to annoy you—you that's laid up wi' a sprained fit, and that bad wi' the cauld that ye can hardly haud up yer heid?" cried Mrs M'Lean, firing up at the mere mention of her rival's name. "Jist you cry ben to me the first time she shows face within the door, and I'll very sune rid ye o' her. I'm wee, but I could maister a bigger wuman than her."

"No, no—no fightin', no fightin'," interposed M'Sweeney, with a roguish twinkle in his eye. "It isn't like ladies to fight; and, besides, she might hit back and hurt ye. No, I've got a plan of me own. She's never done comin' in here and makin' love to me—"

Mrs M'Lean gave a little scream of horror at the revelation, and raised her hands in the air, showing all the whites of her eyes in an upward glance.

"Yes, ye may well be struck dumb," volubly continued M'Sweeney. "She wants to force me to marry her, when the very sight of her nose, or smell of her breath, turns me sick. Mrs M'Lean, I want ye to help me, not by fightin' her, but by disgracin' and shammin' her just when she least expects it."

"My certie! I'll dae that for ye, an' gie her the length o' my tongue into the bargain," fervently answered the widow. "Oh, the disgraceful jaud! to gang and torment a quiet decent man wi' her tongue. No like me, for a'boday says they never hear me speak."

"That's true—I never heard ye spake in my life," said M'Sweeny, crossing himself. "But I want ye to take my place when she comes in at darkening to light the gas, and make up my fire. It's always nearly dark when she comes, so she'll not know the difference. There's no getting her out again wance she sits down, and it would be so funny for you to take my place and hear her make love to you, Mrs M'Lean—troth now, an' ye could talk of it till the end of yer days."

"Tak' yer place!" echoed Mrs M'Lean, with a short scream, "dae ye mean to dress mysel' in breeks?"

"No, no, ye can do widout the breeks," said M'Sweeny, as sweetly and softly as possible. "Ye see my legs are al'ys wrapped in the blanket, and my head in a shawl. All ye would have to do would be to wrap yer head up like mine, after puttin' on a dicky, and this ould coat of mine, and then groan like a miserable victim every time she makes a soft speech."

"But ye're forgettin' my face," eagerly remarked Mrs M'Lean, not ill-pleased with the scheme. "I hinny a big red beard like you."

"Och! never fear—I'll get ye a beard (she's got one already, an inch long—begorra she has, he added to himself); I've one in the top drawer there—a big red one that my chum Jamie M'Govan wears when he wants to strike terror to the hearts of the thaves and robbers by makin' believe he's me. There's hooks at it for goin' over yer ears, and a string for keepin' it round yer neck. Sure, when ye've that on, the half of your face'll be hid; and if she should try to kiss ye, p'raps it'll make it taste as good to her as if ye wor a man."

"But she's awfu' big an' strong, Mr M'Sweeny; she micht hit me," hesitatingly observed Mrs M'Lean.

"Hit ye? Is it bate you that ye mane?" echoed M'Sweeny, with fine satire. "When was Scotland ever bate? Arrah! go along wid ye! Oirland has no chance. I'll match ye agin that big lump of cowardice any day in the week. Besides," he added, with difficulty concealing the merry twinkle in his eye, "if she did hit ye, ye could hit back again. She's never done callin' ye a bad, designin' woman, and a dirty slut—"

"What! does she really daur to mention my name?" screamed Mrs M'Lean, firing up and madly clawing the air.

"Mintion it—humph! Ye'll hear what she'll say of ye," replied M'Sweeny, in intense delight. "All the murderers and thaves and bad characters in Smith's Hotel are nothin' to ye, as she'll say when makin' love to you—I mane to me, av coorse."

"Oh! I'll claw the een oot o' her! I'll tear the heid aff her shouthers!" cried the enraged widow. "Wait till I meet her."

"Arrah! be aisy," soothingly interposed M'Sweeney, who was afraid he might overshoot the mark. "Ye must first hear her miscall ye afore ye can lay a finger on her. Sure, it isn't safe to take those things at second hand; and it might get me into throuble."

"Ye're richt, Maister M'Sweeney—ye're perfectly richt. Oh, the cockle-kitted auld besom! I'll dae what ye ask: I'll pit on a dickey, I'll pretend I'm you, and, oh! if she but opens her mouth against my fair name!"

"But, moind, ye musn't fight—ye musn't fight," mischievously persisted M'Sweeney; "leastways, ye needn't do more than knock her over on the flure."

"Will I no? Just you wait an' see."

"But she might hit back, ye know."

"Let her hit! I'm able to staund my ain grund, am I no? Oh, the vile wuman! Tell me something else she said."

"Well, ye'll hear it all yerself to-morrow; but she said—yes, she said that ye was no better than ye were called."

"I was sure o'd—the limmer! Oh, wait till the morn!"

"That's right. Hoorah, Scotland for ever! Don't forget to slip in here before darkening, unknownst to her."

"I winna! I winna. Oh, my anger'll keep brawly! Wait till the morn!" and with these words she was off, leaving M'Sweeney to have his laugh out alone, and afterwards to incite Mrs Regan against her in turn, by warning her that "that cunning Scotch widdy had some plot against her, and she'd better be cautious and not have anything to say to her," all of which the Irish giantess received with much excitement and avidity. At the same time, however, she expressed herself as perfectly able to protect herself, and said that if the Scotch woman but laid a finger on her she'd twist her head off.

Things being thus arranged with a skill entirely his own, M'Sweeney settled himself to await the approach of evening next day with much impatience. It never struck him that there might be any variation from the programme he had laid down. He merely thought with elation of the two tigresses having it out with each other, and the matter thus ending in their eternal shame and confusion and his own complete freedom. Whether his anticipations were realised or not, I will now try to show.

About half-an-hour before sunset next day there came a

cautious tap at the door, and the moment after, Mrs M'Lean softly entered, with her finger meaningly placed on her lip.

"She's awa' doon at the green, an' she thinks I'm awa' at the mangle," she softly whispered; "so get me dressed as quick as ye like, for she's sure to come in the moment she gets her claes faulded for the mangle."

Nothing loth, M'Sweeney, with the aid of a stick, managed to cross the room for his widest vest and dickey, which he considerably assisted her to put on.

"Oh, Maister M'Sweeney! I hope that ye'll no tak ony advantage o' me—that ye'll no try to kiss me," she fearfully whispered, with a pretty simper, in the midst of this task.

"Och, be aisy!" said her assistant, with palpable disgust; adding aside, "I'd as lief kiss a haddie-man's cuddie."

"Oh, my heart! my heart!" she continued, shutting her eyes, and appearing to totter faintly. "There's something ta'en me roond the heart."

"P'raps it's lumbago," unfeelingly answered M'Sweeney. "Don't faint now, unless you want to flop down, 'cause I'm not able to ketch ye an' hould ye up."

"I dinna think it's my heart either," she faintly gasped, still tottering. "It's a kind o' spasm—a funny fizin' feelin'—"

"It's the colly-wobbles, mebbe?"

"No, it's about my throat or my mouth—I'm no sure which. Look if you see onything aboot my mooth," she sweetly and suggestively added, creeping closer, and trying a languishing look up in his face.

"It's the toothache," said M'Sweeney, shrinking back, and not taking the hint. "Get it pulled, for there's no other cure. Whisht! I believe I hear her comin'—quick, ye devil! or ye won't be ready. Get the beard on. There, that's beautiful! Oh, Mrs M'Lean what a pity ye wasn't a man! Now, the shawl round yer ears, and the blanket about yer legs. Into my chair wid ye, an' put the stick at yer side. It'll look natural, and ye'll mebbe find it handy. Now I'm off into the bed-closet. Now, remember, keep yer face turned from the light, and answer never a word, as I do, and she'll never know you're not me."

Having thus hurriedly arranged the disguise, M'Sweeney hopped off on one foot to his hiding-place, the secret of his haste being, not the sound of approaching footsteps, but the desire to get out of reach of Mrs M'Lean's wheedling powers. A full half-hour, indeed, passed away without any signs of the

expected visitor, and the room was getting very dusky when the sharp rat-tat came to the door, followed by the noisy entrance of Mrs Regan.

"Sure, are ye sittin' in the dark, Mr M'Sweeney, darlin'?" she exclaimed in self-reproach, catching sight of the well-known figure muffled up before the fire. "And I might have come in to light the gas for ye; but sometimes ye like to sit in the dark, and I've been mighty busy. Sure the man that gets me 'll get a tidy bit of money, and a hard working woman into the bargain. Shall I light the gas?"

A surly grunt and an angry tap of the stick on the fender indicated a very decided negative; and without the slightest suspicion, the Irish widow seated herself near the easy chair and chatted on as before.

"I'd rather sit in the dark myself," she said, with a simper which could be only dimly seen in outline. "Ye see, ye won't see my blushes, darlin', and I want to have a long shweet talk wid ye."

"The devil she does!" muttered M'Sweeney in his hiding-place. "It's comin' at last—she's goin' to pop the question."

"Don't groan like that, darlin'," resumed Mrs Regan, as the figure in the chair gave a grunt and a writhe. "It cuts me to the heart to see ye in pain, because I—I—sure, how am I to say it—can ye not guess what I mane?"

An impatient rap of the stick on the fender was the only reply.

"Oh, Mr M'Sweeney! if ever there was a bothersome boy it's yourself. Sure it's written in me eyes what is jumpin' out of me heart. More be token, your sister Honor will soon be back, and I'll never have a chance to tell it ye again."

There was a sharp hiss from the muffled figure, and M'Sweeney could see the hand grasp the stick fiercely and vengefully.

"Oo—hoo—hoo!" whimpered Mrs Regan, beginning to wipe her eyes, "ye'll break my heart, so ye will, ye're so hard and unfeelin'. But I know the cause; don't think I'm blind. It's that impudent slut—that thafe—that owld harridan—Mrs M'Lean."

The figure started—almost jumped up, and it was plain that the words had caused great excitement.

"Ay, ye may well jump," pursued Mrs Regan, as the figure slowly got back to a recumbent position. "For isn't the conduct of *that* woman in everybody's mouth in the land? Doesn't

everybody know what she's after, the ugly imp! Oh, wirra, wirra! that I should have to tell ye! it's not you, darlin', she's after; no, the drunken baste is after the bits of sticks ye have about ye."

"Oo—a—ah!" shrieked the figure in the chair, with another jump, so harshly and suddenly that the tone of voice was never detected by the sobbing widow.

"Yes, it's true," continued Mrs Regan, thinking she had roused him at last; "and it's small mercy yer sister 'ud get when that ould fiend was master. She'd be turned out, bag and baggage, the poor darlin', whom I would be proud to feed and keep all my days as my own sister, if ever I was to get married again, which I never will in this world, unless it's to a very brave man, and a countryman of my own—p'raps some one half as good as yoursilf;" and, with a languishing look, she drew her seat two inches closer to the easy-chair.

"Holy Moses! what an escape I've had!" muttered M'Sweeny to himself, nearly dropping on the floor of the closet in terror at the revelation. "It's comin'—I know it's comin'!"

"Musha, thin! but ye're slow to take a hint," pathetically wailed Mrs Regan, giving her seat another hitch nearer the muffled figure. "If it was that vile woman, Mrs M'Lean, instead of a vartuous hard-workin' and industrious woman, ye'd understand a mighty deal quicker."

The figure groaned and turned away, clutching at the stick with an ominous clench of the fingers.

"M'Sweeny, darlin', I LOVE YE!" blurted out Mrs Regan, desperately flopping down on her knees before the figure, and putting on a wheedling look. "I'm willin' to be your wife and to protect ye forever from that vile robber and blackguard, Mrs M'Lean. I've only three childer, ye may say, seein' the eldest is supported in the Reformatory. Oh, M'Sweeny! don't turn away, but kiss me and say when it's to be."

The figure turned back again with surprising swiftness, the right hand and arm went back in the air for a full swing, and then the flat of the hand came swoop down on Mrs Regan's ear with a stinging force that knocked her over, sprawling in the middle of the floor.

"M'Sweeny, darlin'!" began Mrs Regan, after a moment's speechless astonishment, as the figure snatched up the stick and approached her to follow up the attack. But then the shawl tumbled in disorder from Mrs M'Lean's head, revealing

her in her widow's cap and the huge false beard of red hair.

"The divil!—Mrs M'Lean!" was all she got time to scream, when the stick descended on her back in a rattling succession of blows, that instantly drew together her scattered wits, and roused her to action. She had little trouble in rising, for the hand of Mrs M'Lean was already entwined in her hair, and the furious tug helped her to bound from the floor as from a spring-board. Then Mrs M'Lean's brief triumph was in a moment eclipsed. One swoop of the great hand and arm of the Irish widow, and the cap of her rival was torn from her head, and a large portion of the hair along with it. Then the left fist flew out like a battering-ram and caught Mrs M'Lean under the eye, effectually closing it for a full week to come, and driving her over on the floor as straight and helpless as a ninepin.

"You'd put on a wig an' stick yerself in a chair, to make believe ye were M'Sweeney!" hoarsely shouted the Irish widow; "as if any one wid half an eye couldn't tell the difference! Ye thought I didn't know ye all the time? Ha, ha, ha,—the stupidity of some people—it amuses me, so it does!"

"Ladies, ladies!" cried M'Sweeney, hopping out of his place of concealment in his shirt-sleeves, and holding up his hand in gentle reproach, "don't fight in my house and disgrace me forever. Get out on the stair-head if ye want to have it out."

"Oh, ye decaivin' wretch! ye murderin' villain! to go an' plot against a poor widdy," screamed Mrs Regan, darting upon him, seizing him by the hair, and whirling him round her in an agonising hop on one foot. "What do you mane by it? I'll break every bone in your ugly body, so I will."

"Help, help! murder! Mrs M'Lean, ye know what she called ye—pound away at her!" desperately shouted M'Sweeney; and thus nerved on to the contest, Mrs M'Lean whirled back the stick in the air for a deadly blow at her rival's head; but owing to one eye being closed, was rather defective in her aim, and brought it down full force on M'Sweeney's head instead.

"Ye ould rattle-trap! what do you mane by that?" cried Mrs Regan, as M'Sweeney dropped with a roar like a stricken bull, "ye meant that for me—after decaivin' and chatin' and laughin' at me. There;" and, with a bang and a thousand flashes of light, Mrs M'Lean found herself in total darkness. But though both her eyes were closed, she could still feel, and her nails in **another** instant were **hard at work** on Mrs Regan's face

and dress ; and then, being suddenly shaken off and knocked down on the floor, she transferred her attentions to the face of M'Sweeney, which was the first thing that came to hand. Then she got a hold of the stick again in scrambling about the floor, and making a wild and desperate swing with it through the air, was fortunate enough to catch her rival full on the nose with the heavy knobbed end—thus making Ireland again bite the dust at her feet, and causing M'Sweeney to make a swift and crab-like movement toward the door, which he banged open just in time to admit the police and a crowd of neighbours, who had been attracted by the shrieks and cries.

The two tigresses, still hard at work on each other, were torn asunder and held back, and then M'Sweeney's words were heard.

"Och, murder ! I'm kilt !—I'm dead ! an' these two tigresses have done it all. Take them away. Peter, I charge them with creatin' a disturbance in my house, fightin' wid each other, and then assaultin' me. Saint Patrick ! to think that a great detective sud be left at the mercy of a couple of tigresses, an' he on the sick-list too ! Hould me up ! hould me up ! for I think I'll faint."

"And I charge that vile woman with assaultin' me !" cried all that was left of Mrs Regan.

"And I charge that auld Irish besom wi' beatin' me !" cried Mrs M'Lean, speaking towards the spot whence her rival's voice seemed to come from.

A tumult of recrimination followed, of which Solomon himself could have made nothing ; and as the only solution to the difficulty, the policemen were compelled to march off both tigresses, who were locked up till they could find bail to appear next day.

A most miserable spectacle did the two present next morn- ing at the Police Court ; and as for M'Sweeney himself, who had come in a cab as evidence, there did not appear to be a whole bit of skin on his face, while the back of his head—just where they say the bump of self-esteem should be—stuck up like a Cossack's spear from the effects of one of the blows. Mrs M'Lean was spared the sight of a police court, both her eyes being shut, and had to be led in ; while Mrs Regan's nose, for size, would have passed for a prize turnip. A sorrowful tale was M'Sweeney's, but, as usual, when he wished to be most earnest and solemn, he only provoked the whole court to convulsions of merriment. He was advised to be more cautious

in future in admitting rival widows simultaneously within his door ; while the tigresses were fined in the usual five shillings, and ordered to find caution to keep the peace for six months. They never troubled him again, but, as I said in starting, it was long ere the incidents were allowed to be forgotten ; and for years the very mention of the “two tigresses” was sufficient to drive the blood from his cheeks, as well as every vestige of boasting for the time being from his talk.

A DRUNKEN THIEF.

How seldom is the secret spring of our actions known to the world ! We see a man wise and good, and bow before him in instinctive reverence ; but it is possible that the man may owe the first impulse of all his goodness and wisdom to witnessing the folly and depravity of a drunken father. Many a time, while pondering in solitude over the inscrutable ways of Providence, has the question, " Of what good is such a wretch in the world ? " been hushed on my lips. It seems to me that, unknown to thousands, there is a kind of law of repulsiveness, or loathing, that comes into active operation with every such miserable object, which often silently works out a greater good in the end in those who are the enforced spectators. Mark me, I don't say that it is always so ; indeed, it is often quite the reverse ; for it is only the finer natures who recoil, while the commoner are corrupted. But this I do say, that I have met with more than one case of the kind I am about to detail ; and I am inclined to believe that many of the brightest links in the long chain of humanity which connects us with the beginning of time, if closely examined, will be found to be preceded by others which seem to us dull and faulty.

A man utterly given up to drink—a sot who would swallow anything, from the vilest hard ale up through every stage of aquafortis, whisky and brandy, to laudanum—could never be a successful thief. For this reason Dan M'Kinnon was kicked out of the Maclusky gang. It may seem strange to some, but I am speaking facts. If the truth were only known, it requires a clearer head, more cunning, and at times much harder work, to be a successful thief than an honest man. M'Kinnon, though useful to the gang for a time, sank deeper and deeper ; and at last, through neglecting his three children, and thus attracting the attention of the parochial authorities, as well as being ready to serve any one—even the police—for drink, he was fairly thrown off, and so hunted and annoyed that he was forced to leave the city. He found refuge in Glasgow, in one

of those miserable dens in the Havannah; and it is at this point in his life that my sketch begins. The change brought no improvement to M'Kinnon, for he was now too lazy to steal, and sank into a kind of begging loafer; but with the children, strange to say, it was different. The girls, Eliza and Agnes, had struggled on, God only knows how, and had managed to pick up a few letters and a little writing, when they were accidentally discovered by one of the city missionaries. This gentleman finding that, though only ten and eleven years respectively they could both use the needle a little, and were willing to work their fingers to the very bone for little Freddy—who was just eight, and always ailing—introduced them to a poor tailor in the neighbourhood called John Nicol. This man, who had already buried a wife and children of his own, and was blessed with a warm, loving heart, took to the two girls like a second father, and not only employed them, but at first paid them far above the value of their labour. I say “at first,” because they soon showed such surprising quickness and diligence that they not only earned their little wages to the full, but began to be an actual blessing to the man who had befriended them. Perhaps I am doing wrong in calling John Nicol a tailor, seeing that at this time he only worked for “slop shops,” and had at times a hard enough struggle to make ends meet; but great things have often a small beginning, as will be very clearly seen before I have done with him.

But with all their hard work and well-doing, although seldom in actual want, Eliza and Agnes did not rise an inch in the social scale. And why? Can you not guess? It was like attempting to fill a pitcher with water while a great hole remains unstopped in the bottom. M'Kinnon—the drunken sot, the brutal madman—was a constant drain upon them. What blows—what terrible threats and fearful oaths—these two girls had to submit to, I shudder to think of. At times they even gave themselves up for lost, so like a murderer did the wretch look and act in his determined robbing of their hard earnings; and many a terrible bruise and hurt had to be hidden from John Nicol, or spoken lightly of, to save their father from prison. There is a limit, however, to the most patient endurance of wrong and cruelty. No amount of reasoning or persuasion could shake the love of these girls for their father, till he himself struck at that tender feeling. One evening, never to be forgotten by either of them, brought about the long-impending rupture.

It was Saturday night, in the depth of winter, and Eliza, the eldest, was wearily climbing the dark stair to their miserable home, faintly wondering what was to be the end of all their struggles. Agnes, owing to the alarming illness of their brother, who had caught a fever which had been floating about the place for months, had been at home the whole week nursing and tending the sick boy, while her sister strove, by doubling her energies, to make the difference in their earnings unfelt. It was toil, heavy and incessant, allowing of scarcely a moment's thought; yet she faced it, and fought through it bravely. And now, just as she was nearing their own door, with the great weight of the week off her mind, and beginning to think in the cool darkness, she caught the sound of some one singing softly a little hymn, and paused to listen. The voice of Agnes she had at once recognised; but it was another faint crooning of the melody—a faint attempt of a child's weak voice to join in with the singer—that startled the toil-worn girl, and made her stand there in the dark, holding her throbbing head tight in her hands, with the tears crowding thick into her eyes:—

“There is a happy land,
Far, far away,
Where saints in glory stand,
Bright, bright as day.”

The simple strain rose and swelled through the little hovel, till the poor girl outside, shaking from head to foot, passionately raised her clasped hands through the darkness towards heaven, crying—

“Oh God! why not take us—take us all now?”

The mere venting of the eager, despairing cry seemed to bring her calmness, and a moment after she raised the latch and entered. Agnes was seated by the bed, supporting Freddy's light form in her arms. The boy's eyes were wide open and wondrously bright, and a thrill ran through Eliza as she thought that, in spite of his shadowy appearance, he looked better than he had been for many a day. A glad cry and a weakly opening of his arms showed that she was recognised; and folding him tight to her breast, she raised and kissed him repeatedly. But the sudden joy was too much for him in his weak state, and it took long to soothe and still his convulsive sobbing.

“Why should you cry, Freddy? Aren't you glad to see sister Liza?” said the elder girl, scarcely less moved than he and exchanging a meaning glance with her sister.

"Yes, and didn't I sing you the nice hymn that you asked for?" added Agnes, with a tender smile that was meant to be reproachful.

"Yes, you sang it, and I sang it too," sighed the boy, with an old, old look on his thin features; "I can't sing it very well just now; but I'll be able to sing it better in heaven. Won't I, sister Agnes?"

Both sisters turned sharp away at the question, and their eyes met in a glance of alarm that rapidly became tearful.

"In heaven?" lightly echoed Eliza, with a great pang at heart. "Oh, Freddy, you would never wish to go there without us?"

The question appeared to pull up the boy, for a cloud instantly settled on his pinched face, as if two forces had suddenly begun to tug his heart in opposite directions.

"No, I wouldn't like to leave you," he whispered at last, as he nestled closer into Eliza's bosom; "but it must be nice to be in heaven—so warm, and bright, and happy. And then—and then—there's no fathers there—"

"Hush, Freddy! hush!" cried Eliza, white with terror. "You mus'n't say anything against father;" and she kissed him passionately. "Mind, now—never, never again."

But the cloud on the boy's face only deepened, and, as chance would have it, his eyes wandered to a dark bruise on the girl's neck.

"But—but—he beats you!" he persisted, flushing up, as he forced the words out.

"Yes, but God gives us strength to bear it all," bravely returned the girl; "and we never repine as long as you are left to us."

The last words seemed to set the boy a-thinking—more deeply, indeed, than his strength would allow; for, after a pause, he said—

"I'm weary, weary, sister Liza. Put me in my bed."

He was nicely tucked in and made comfortable, with only the hand left out that grasped a big orange she had brought home for him; but the busy thoughts would not be stilled, and with a curious calmness he suddenly asked—

"If I was to die, sister Liza, would they bury me in this awful place?"

But sister Liza only covered up her face with her hands and made no reply. Agnes was weeping silently, with her back turned, over the cooking of her sister's supper, which she was

salting with her tears. But there was no sound—no noise—only a heavy, heart-throbbing stillness.

“I wouldn’t like to be buried here,” dreamily pursued the sick boy—“here where the men drink and fight and bleed, and the women shout and look fierce. I would like to be taken back to Edinburgh, to the nice place where you saw mother buried. The birds would sing over me there, and the pretty flowers would wave about and look bright in the sun.”

There were sobs now through the little room—stifling, heart-breaking sobs; and the supper got leave to frizzle on the fire unheeded, for the sisters had forgotten all about it.

“Mother will be in heaven when I get there,” softly continued the boy. “I know she will, for she was never a thief, and never got drunk and beat you. I think I will know her, too, among all the great crowd, for I have dreamt so often of seeing her. She was always bright and shining, and holding out her arms towards me, and looking into my face with such beautiful loving eyes; and when she smiled, I cried right out and tried to run into her arms. But when I woke and only found myself here, I cried more than ever.

Liza said nothing; but she put forth her arms round his slender form as he lay, and clutched him tightly, as if fiercely defying any power to take him from them. Agnes found voice, after a pause, to say, in a choking way—

“But God will make you strong and well, Freddy; and then you’ll grow up to be a man and work for us.”

“I don’t know,” sighed the boy, with a weary shake of the head that made him for the moment look an old man. Ever since Mr Irving came here and read to us, and learned us the hymns, and spoke to me so kindly all by myself, I have thought, and thought, and thought, till my heart was like to burst within me. You know I’m only a little boy, and so weak, and I don’t even know my letters well yet; and it seems such a long way to struggle up to be anything, that I’m sure I would sink down with weariness, and just go wrong and turn thief like other boys. But to-day, when sister Agnes was out, I asked Mr Irving if he thought I would die, and—and—but I think you’re crying, Liza dear?” and he tried to start back so as to get a look at her face.

But she held him close, and merely whispered, huskily—

“I am not, Freddy—I am calm and happy; but what did Mr Irving say?”

“He said—but you will not cry if I tell you?”

"I will not cry, Freddy dear; I will smile and kiss you," replied Eliza, with a shiver.

"Well, he said he wasn't sure; but that I shouldn't trouble my head about it, for God would put me wherever I could do most good. And then I told him what I once heard him say long ago—'that it was better to die than to grow up a thief;' and then he looked at me a long time, and cried a little. I saw him wiping his eyes, and then he said I was a good boy. Ah! if he only knew how cross and fretful I am, he wouldn't have said that."

"But we don't think you cross, Freddy dear," said Eliza, with a close cuddle, "for we wouldn't part with you for all the world. And we will work hard for you—oh, ever so hard!—and get a great doctor to come and see you; and then you will get strong and walk about, and come and sit beside us at work, and forget about all these things, and grow up a good man."

Freddy did not answer her readily; indeed, he lay there thinking, with his eyes shut, and took so long to come to any conclusion that would not grieve them, that at last, in exhaustion, he dozed over and fell asleep. Eliza gently withdrew her arm from his head, made a little shade with the bedcover to shield his face from the light, and then for the first time looked straight into her sister's eyes. What she saw there must have been written plainer than if it had been spoken, for the two girls instantly became wreathed in each other's arms, and then sobbed and clung to each other as if they were already alone in the world.

Weary and worn though Eliza was, she could think of no refreshment, but sat there by the bed with her sister's head fondled in her lap, and listening to her brother's every breath as if on it her own depended.

"When did this change come over him?" she at length whispered.

"It has been on him all day," was the choking reply; "and, oh, Liza dear! he has said such strange things, and been so bright and talkative, and so eager to have that hymn sung, that sometimes I had to go out to the stair-head to have my cry out without him seeing me."

A spasm passed over Eliza's face, which might have broken into a sob, but with a strong effort it was conquered. and she said, in many tones—

"Did Mr Irving say anything?"

"Yes ; he doubts very much—"

"That will do, Aggie dear," calmly put in Eliza. "We must get another doctor—the best that can be had. Freddy must not die, though the debts should be a drag on us all our lifetime."

"But Mr Irving is only a missionary," said Agnes, hopefully. "He might be mistaken."

"He might—hush ! do you hear that ?"

Both girls started and paled as they listened breathlessly to a lumbering footstep on the stair and passage outside. Too well they knew the heavy stagger, hard breathing, and thick cursing, as they heard a man groping towards their door. Both glanced fearfully towards the bed, and then flew to open the door noiselessly, that the little sleeper might not be disturbed. But when M'Kinnon stumbled noisily into the room with a shower of oaths, the faint hope died within them.

"Oh, father !" cried Eliza, clasping her hands before him in piteous entreaty, "Freddy is so ill ! Do step softly and let him sleep !"

"Ill—ill ?" he answered, with maudlin ferocity ; "so am I—dying—dying, for something to drink. Bring it—curses on you all ! bring it instantly !" and the last furious stamp caused the sick boy to start up with a cry of terror.

"Oh, father ! don't strike them ! don't strike them !" he wildly screamed, with his great eyes nearly starting from his head, as he tried to scramble from the bed. "Strike me first !" but then his little stock of strength was exhausted, and he fell back, quivering in his sister's arms.

"Strike them !" savagely echoed the drunkard. "I'll murder every one of you, if you don't give me money or drink this instant. Come on, now, you—where's your wages ? Out with them, or I'll strangle you !" and he seized Eliza by the shoulder and tore her away from the poor boy.

"Father, I can't give you money, or I would give you every penny this minute, if only for Freddy's sake," dauntlessly replied the girl ; "but Mr Nicol was afraid you would get it, and said he would keep it for me, and only give me enough for each day as it came. He is to bring along things for to-morrow in the morning, when he comes to see Freddy."

"Liar—liar !" cried the infuriated wretch, almost wrenching her shoulder out of joint with his strong hand. "Where have you hidden it ? Quick ! speak, or you haven't another hour's life in you !"

"She hasn't hidden it," interposed the timid Agnes, firing to an unusual boldness; "she had nothing but the penny to buy Freddy's orange."

"Ha! Freddy, indeed!" fiercely returned the drunkard, glaring at the wide, round eyes of the sick boy; "he must have oranges, while I must either die or risk getting into quod. He pretends he's ill, too—curse you! I believe you've hidden the money under him! Turn it out quick, you young imp, or I'll soon cure you of illness!" and hurling off the girl, he made a grasp at the boy, and with one swing had him out of the bed on the floor.

A scream burst from the girls as the light form swung through the air, and they threw themselves *on* the madman to drag him back. But M'Kinnon stood like a rock, now that his passion was roused, glaring like a fiend down into the terror-stricken face of the boy.

"The money, you little hypocrite! the money!" he screamed.

The boy's teeth chattered, and he turned deadly pale in the effort to get out words; but the father, now thoroughly madened, hurled him backward with terrific force, crying—

"There! that'll make you speak, I think!"

The head of the sick boy struck the wall heavily, as had been intended, and he sank down on his hands and side.

"Oh, father! kiss me before I die!" was all he got out; and, with a faint effort to crawl forward, he dropped on the floor in a swoon.

M'Kinnon was not moved—could not be,—for at that moment he was a devil, not a man, and only turned furiously to vent his wrath on the girls. But an appalling spectacle met his gaze—at least, one that, from its very uncommonness, paralysed him into helplessness. Eliza, with her eyes burning like live coals, and her delicate form reared almost to a woman's stateliness, had suddenly hurled open the door, and now turned and threw herself upon him with the strength of twenty strong men in her slight frame. One grasp—a great wrench and pull at the astounded wretch—and she had him out, across the passage, and hurried with terrific force down the stairs! He was not much hurt, for he fell soft, as most drunkards do, but he was thoroughly cowed; and instead of attempting to come back and retaliate by bursting in the locked door, he merely slunk away to try and find drink or money elsewhere.

In the meantime Eliza had dropped into a chair, shaking

hysterically with the revulsion of the nerves, and Agnes had tenderly raised the senseless boy and tried to bring back something like colour to his cheeks and light to his eyes. But when he did come round, nothing could soothe him or convince him that his father was not still in the room. He tossed, and moaned, and struggled, till Eliza, pale and exhausted, said to Agnes—

“He is worse—we must get the doctor. Oh, Aggie dear! I’m afraid father has hurt him.”

Agnes made no reply, but tugged on her things with trembling fingers, and turned away to the door.

“Will I bring Mr Irving too?” she said, as she opened the door.

“Do—and run!”

Agnes was gone, and Eliza was left alone with her great sorrow. Her brain was in a whirl, but through it all she now saw one resolution shining clearly and fixedly. Her father should never, never injure them more—that she vowed, and fervently prayed for strength to carry it out. As if to soothe her after the struggle and prayer, Freddy became quieter in her arms, and even smiled faintly through his half-closed eyes. By and by she heard him whisper huskily, and then she fancied he was trying weakly to join in with some one singing; and the tears stole into her eyes as she recognised the words—

“There is a happy land,
Far, far away.”

But there was no bitterness in the tears now, for they came with a soft gush that seemed to take all her sorrows away.

“Poor, poor wee Freddy!” she ejaculated. “It is better that it should be so. He will be better in heaven. Mother will shield him in her bosom, and there father can never go.”

In half-an-hour Agnes returned breathless, accompanied by the missionary, Mr Irving. The doctor was to follow shortly. But little Freddy was now out of the reach of all ministrations, however kind and skilful. He moaned and tossed, recognising no one, and in continual fear of a brutal father hidden somewhere about the bed, and about to spring on his sisters and beat them unmercifully.

“Strike me first, father!—oh, strike me first!” was his continual whisper; but he was too weak for even that, and at last sunk into a half-wakeful slumber, in which his breath came long and slow, and sometimes fluttered as if about to die out

altogether. About two o'clock in the morning he suddenly started and smiled. Eliza bent over him in quick joy at finding herself recognised; but at the same moment he fell back the light died in his eyes, and his head drooped forward, while his last whisper fell on the ears of the breathless spectators—

“Far, far away!”

Poor little Freddy was gone! and in a great blinding succession of screams the two brave girls forgot everything, till they found both doctor and missionary tending them, and a kindly neighbour drawing a white sheet over the still little form on the bed. All through that darksome night, and long after the good missionary had uttered his touching prayer for the bereaved ones and departed, Eliza watched by the bedside with Agnes's head on her lap. They cried none now—their grief had carried them past that—and scarcely spoke. But out of their great sorrow there seemed to grow a deeper and closer bond of love, for as they clung to each other sitting there by the one object of all their toils which had been so suddenly torn from them, in one or two whispers they opened their hearts to each other on a subject that both had hitherto shunned.

“We must leave father,” said Eliza, who, though only a year older than her sister, always assumed the mother's place; “and, oh, Aggie dear! how I wish I had taken Mr Nicol's advice and left him before.”

“Hush, sister,” said Aggie, softly, pulling her sister's face from the direction of the little still form; “God knows what is best. You said so to me before, and now you've forgotten it yourself.”

The grey morn came, slow and heavy, over the dark mass of buildings surrounding their home. When it was fairly light, Eliza slipped on her things and got out into the cold, deserted streets, and hurried off in the direction of her kind employer's home.

Sunday morning—calm, cool, and soothing, after such a Saturday—Eliza saw many Sabbaths after that, but never one that stood out so deathless in her memory. It was to be the beginning of a new life—it was the first step out of a gloomy valley, from which she was to rise into the shining light of the heaven above. She had a passport at all times to the presence of John Nicol, and soon stood before him—white, womanly, and tearless. But his glad smile and hearty welcome brought no response to her face, and he started back in alarm.

"Freddy—is he worse? he asked, striving to read her face, with a pang of dread striking his own heart.

"Freddy is in heaven, and I am come to speak to you," was the calm reply.

But then she began to quiver and shake, so that he had to take her in both arms and lift her bodily into an easy-chair by the cosy fireside.

"Freddy dead, and I not there!" he ejaculated; and then the tears came thick into his eyes, while those of the girl remained dry and bright.

By degrees he drew from her the incidents already recorded, passing lightly over the cruelty of her father; and then she opened up the business that lay heaviest on her heart.

"Poor Freddy—dear dead, wee brother!—said he would like to buried beside my mother at Edinburgh. Oh, Mr Nicol, I know you are not rich, and I know it would cost a great deal of money to do it; but if you could only help us in this one thing, Agnes and I will bind ourselves to work for you all our lives for nothing!" and eagerly seizing his hand, she dropped on her knees before him and wet his fingers with the first tears she had shed in his presence.

For a moment or two the kind-hearted man could articulate no reply, for his heart was fuller than her own; but he raised her in his arms and put her back in her seat, and at last managed in a husky tone to say—

"There—not another word, Liza; for though it cost me every penny I had in the world, Freddy's last wish should never go unheeded."

"Oh, bless you! bless you for your kindness!" impulsively burst forth the girl. "Oh! you don't know how diligent, how devoted, we will be to you! We will work for you harder than if you had been our own father."

But there John Nicol's brow got clouded, and he shook his head with a deep sigh.

"Ah! you think he will be a drag upon us," eagerly put in the girl, with eyes glistening with emotion. "No! from this day Agnes and I face the world alone! We spoke of it last night—and of all your goodness and kind offers. We will be your daughters now, and God will help us to be good ones."

"What! do you really mean it?" joyfully ejaculated the lonely man; "and you will take me, a poor, useless man for your father—me, who have nothing but hard work and a peaceful home to offer you?"

Eliza made no reply, but, dropping on her knees, took his hand within her own and reverently kissed it.

"You are our father, and from this day your name shall be ours. We vowed it over our wee dead brother; and perhaps when you are older and weaker, God may help us to pay back all we owe to your goodness."

There was something solemn in the contract, and the voice that uttered the words had little of girlishness in it—indeed, it seemed as if in one short night Eliza had suddenly leaped into thoughtful womanhood.

Three days after this a little hearse wound its way out to the Dean Cemetery in Edinburgh, followed by three solitary mourners—a man and two girls. The snow was thick on the ground, and had to be dug through to get at the grave. Eliza and Agnes cried very quietly while the little coffin was being hidden from sight; but when the men raised their hats and turned away, they knelt down on the frozen turf and prayed that the dark way before them might be made light and clear by Him to whom the motherless can always turn. Just as they finished, and their adopted father was raising his hat and saying "Amen," a little bird fluttered out of a neighbouring bush with a glad carol, and mounted and mounted in the clear air, followed by the glistening eyes of the two girls, till it was lost in the clouds. Then Eliza looked into her sister's face, and they both smiled—in a quiet, beaming way; and then they kissed each other and left the ground, feeling calmer and more peaceful than they had felt for years.

Now, it happened that the visit to Edinburgh, undertaken as a mission of love, was to turn out the means of a very important change in the destiny of all three. Before returning to Glasgow, John Nicol met an old acquaintance who had long lost sight of him, and who was at that time on the point of retiring from a kind of tailor and drapery business in the High Street. A kind invitation to his house was pressed upon John Nicol and his adopted daughters, and in the course of the evening it was actually arranged between the two that the premises and small stock were to be made over on easy terms to the poor Glasgow "slop-worker." It is true that at first he resolutely refused to incur the responsibility; but on Eliza being referred to, and strongly urging him to accept, he changed his mind, and agreed to remove at once to Auld Reekie.

Thus it was that M'Kinnon was left to pursue his own evil course in Glasgow, while the energy, brightness, and intelligence

of the two girls were rapidly raising their adopted father from poverty and obscurity to wealth and affluence in Edinburgh. The little business swelled and grew in their hands ; the tailoring department had at last to be dropped altogether ; and from one end of the town to the other there was not an acquaintance of the two young Misses Nicol that did not vie with another in worshipping their beauty and goodness. It was at this time that I first made their acquaintance, as I thought, for it never struck me that I had seen the faces before, when younger and sunk deep in misery. I saw them and spoke to them many a time as they bravely waded through some of our worst slums, doing good on every hand, and attending regularly at a little school into which drunkards' bairns and other towsey waifs and strays were enticed for their own good ; but I knew them only as the Misses Nicol, daughters of a flourishing merchant in High Street. I was to be rudely awakened from the delusion ; and how it came about is not without interest.

I was walking down High Street one forenoon, when I was attracted by a crowd a little above Knox's Corner. I crossed over, hearing an angry voice, and pushed through at once, only to be astonished by beholding Miss Eliza Nicol in tears, and crimson with shame, standing in the grasp of an infuriated drunkard, whom I instantly recognised as a shadow of Dan M'Kinnon.

"Money—money—money ! turn it out, you silk-and-satin Jezebel !" he shouted, as I pushed in ; and then, to my surprise, she hastily produced her purse, and was about to place a sovereign in his hand, when I interposed with a touch on her arm.

"Stay, Miss Nicol," I said. "Do not trouble yourself with this villain, but hand him over to me. His name is M'Kinnon, and he is an old offender."

"Oh, no, no, Mr M'Govan !" she hysterically rejoined—"not for a moment. He is—he is—my father !"

"Your father !" I started right back, staring curiously in her face to see if she were not mad.

"Ay, her father, Jamie M'Govan !" triumphantly retorted the brutal sot. "Her father—starving, dying, while she and her sister are rolling in wealth. You can't take me up for that, can you ?"

He clutched the sovereign as he spoke, and elbowed himself away, while I drew the young lady aside and tried to soothe her into calmness.

"Do you really mean to tell me that you and your sister are the two little girls whom I once was near taking to—"

"The Poorhouse? Yes," was the unflinching reply. "Mr Nicol is only an adopted father."

"But there was a little child too—a boy, I think. What became of him?" I asked, expecting the old, old answer.

She must have read the thought in my face, for she said brightly—

"No, he did not go astray. He was taken to heaven!"

I parted with her after a short conversation, sympathising with her trouble, and quite sure in my own mind that M'Kinnon's first appearance would be but the prelude to a long series of extortions. But in this I was wrong, as I have now to show.

On the night following this meeting, Eliza and Agnes, who were alone in their home in Clerk Street, were surprised by the intimation that a strange man was at the door demanding to see them. They both fluttered out in dismay, only to find their worst fears confirmed. It was M'Kinnon. But he was no longer insolent—on the contrary, was white and shivering, in spite of the bright warm summer day that had just gone—and sank down with a groan on the stone steps while he faintly tried to address them.

"I—I—am afraid I'm going to be ill, my girls," he said, with a fearful look around. "And the doctor said I would never stand another attack; I want to say good-bye."

He looked up in their faces, so wistful and haggard, that they both turned away and covered their eyes with their hands. The drunkard shivered, and looked round with chattering teeth that would hardly let out his next words—

"I know that I have been a wicked wretch, and that I killed poor Freddy. He has haunted me ever since. I don't want you to touch me, or shake my hand, or anything—only to say good-bye."

The two girls burst out now and sobbed as if their hearts would break; and then, reading each other's hearts through the blinding tears, they raised the poor wretch with loving hands from the stone steps, supported his quivering frame into the house, and soon had him tucked comfortably into their own soft bed. But M'Kinnon was now beyond all care, for before John Nicol arrived, and the doctor was sent for, he was raving and fighting in delirium. In this state he lingered for many days; but, though blessed with every attention, he sank rapidly and surely to the grave.

“Don’t bury me near Freddy—mind, don’t!” were the last lucid words he spoke. “I only came to say good-bye.”

And thus died a man who, as we reason, had been useless to the world, a curse to society, and a disgrace to his own children. And yet he left to the world two great blessings. Eliza and Agnes, as if purified by fire, rose to what I call a brilliant career. Their goodness, virtue, and accomplishments attracted notice; and, from the society they latterly moved in, splendid matches in marriage were the result. But wealth, far from turning their heads and sending their thoughts soaring after costly silks, satins, furs, and such-like extravagant dress—the curse of this fine-feathered city,—only increased their power of doing good. They were kind and good to all, but particularly to those lost through drink. Hundreds could never understand the tearful sympathy which both sisters manifested for the poor waifs and strays left in the drunkard’s desolating track; but I have here revealed the secret without exposing the identity of the ladies. One case in particular, where a little boy, through his father’s dissipation, was brought to an early grave, excited their deepest sympathies. People saw them weep passionately over the little coffin—even more so than the poor stricken mother—and wondered at their grief. But people saw only the surface, and could not know that the thoughts of the grand ladies had gone back to a little garret where a boy lay dying in the arms of two distracted girls, blessing the father who sent him to the grave, and faintly trying to sing—

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